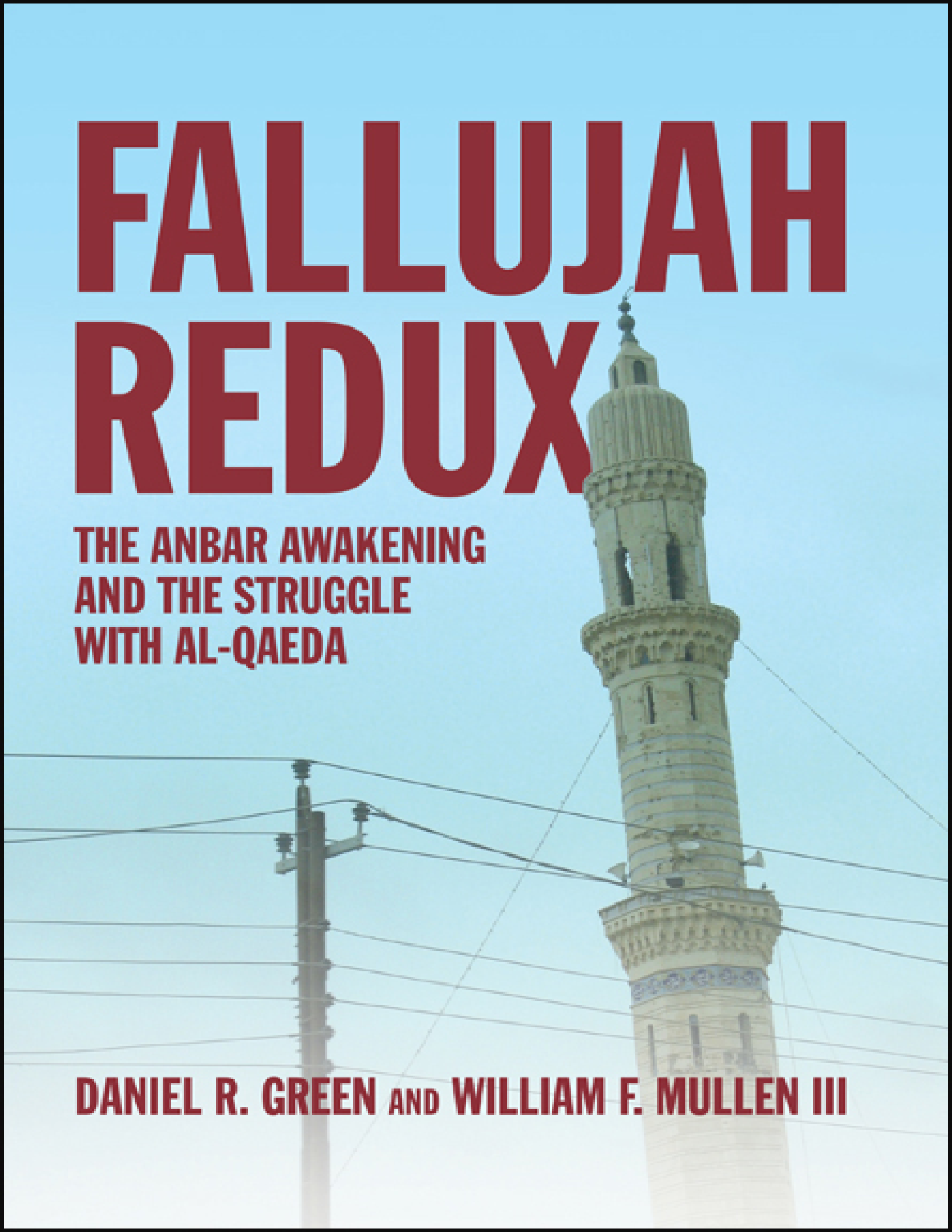
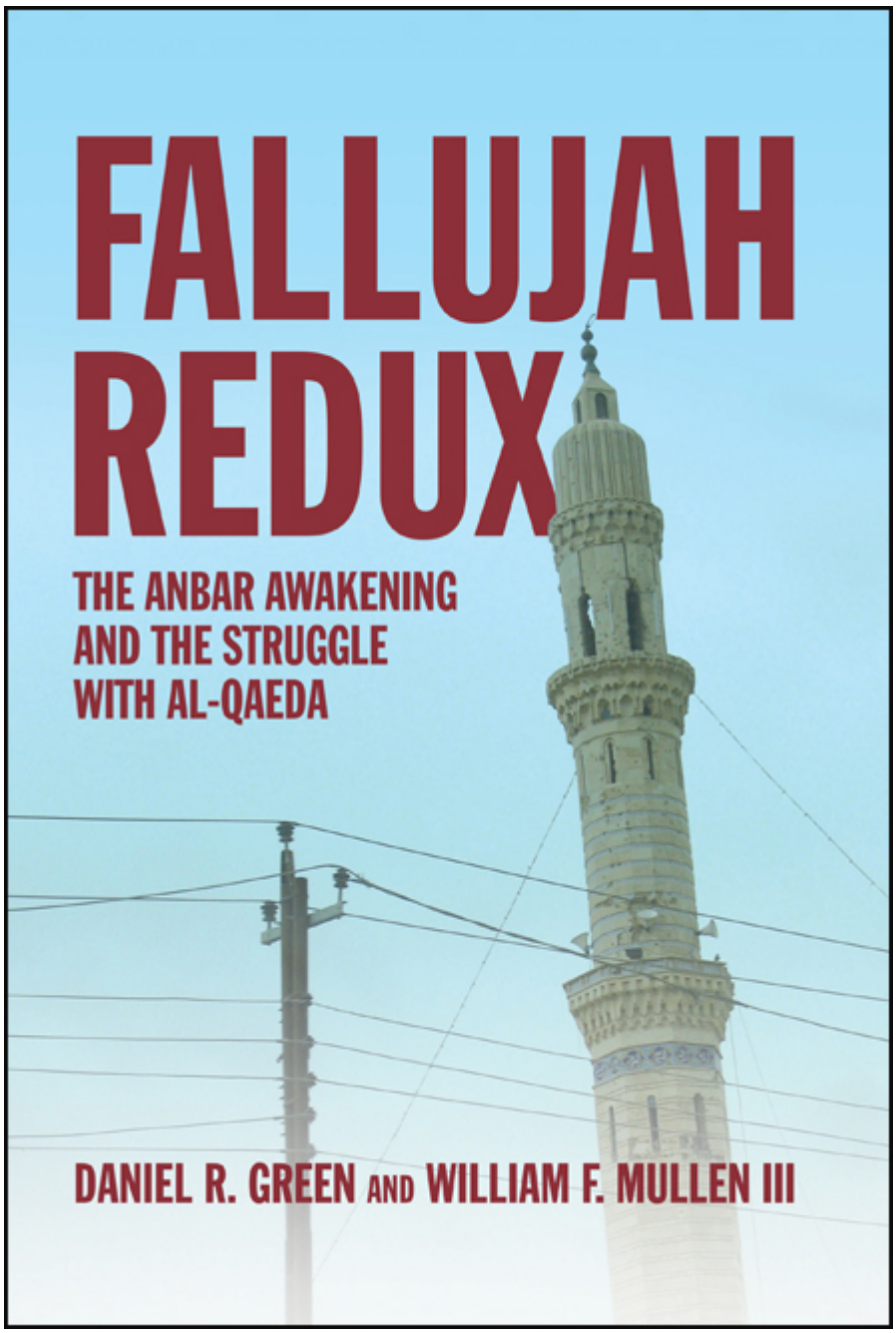
FALLUJAH REDUX

THE ANBAR AWAKENING AND THE STRUGGLE WITH AL-QAEDA



DANIEL R. GREEN AND WILLIAM F. MULLEN III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DANIEL R. GREEN AND WILLIAM F. MULLEN III

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Even when all the experts agree, they may well be mistaken.
Bertrand Russell

How you start is important, but it is how you finish that counts. In the race for success, speed is less important than stamina. The sticker outlasts the sprinter. In America, we breed too many hares, and not enough tortoises.
B. C. Forbes

The tribe was a community which went on forever, because it was based on family relationship, not on the ups and downs of politics.
John Bagot Glubb, former British officer, 1948

My duties were simple; I was to encourage the local inhabitants to stand up for themselves.
Alec Kirkbride, former British officer, colleague of T. E. Lawrence, and diplomat, 1971

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|| Foreword ||

As 2014 began, Fallujah, Iraq, was once again in the headlines across the United States as al-Qaeda–affiliated forces seized the city, hoisted their black flag over its government offices, and announced their return to power. As a Marine officer who had served in Fallujah and had the great privilege of leading our forces there, this news greeted me like a thunderbolt as it did thousands of veterans who had served and sacrificed in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some military veterans lamented the loss calling into question whether the great sacrifices of our service members and our country were worth the result. No single battle, no one event was ever going to determine whether Coalition Forces fundamentally defeated al-Qaeda in Iraq or across the world, because defeating an idea requires more than just force of arms. As was always the case, it is up to the Iraqis to win or lose the struggle against radical Islam in their own country. Regardless of one's opinion of the war in Iraq, there can be no question our forces performed brilliantly in fighting this radical menace, and even if al-Qaeda in its various forms remains on the march in the region and globally, our troops met every test and made every sacrifice to liberate Al-Anbar and Fallujah from this scourge. The opportunity to give the Iraqi people the chance to chart a future course without violence, where political compromise and the struggles of politics replaced the struggle of arms, was the greatest gift our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines could give the Iraqi people. The fact that Iraqi politicians have squandered that gift does not diminish what we did in Al-Anbar.

The year 2014 is important in other ways as well, since it is also the ten-year anniversary of the battles for the city, respectively Operation Vigilant

Resolve in April 2004 and Operation Phantom Fury in November 2004, which began the process of helping the Iraqi people turn against al-Qaeda. These battles secured the city and permanently enshrined the word "Fallujah" into the minds of the American people. The battles fought there now occupy a sacred place in the storied annals of the United States Marine Corps. The sacrifices to secure Fallujah were significant, and while U.S. forces decisively defeated the al-Qaeda militants, absent a local Iraqi partner to hold the city a smoldering insurgency remained. As the Anbar Awakening movement began in 2006, a new opportunity was created for U.S. forces to more actively partner with the Iraqi people to help them turn against terrorism and foster a peaceful society. As villages, tribes, and neighborhoods joined local police forces and began the process of rejecting al-Qaeda, this popular uprising slowly inched its way eastward from the town of Al Qaim on the Syrian border to Fallujah. As tribal engagement efforts began to bear fruit and a comprehensive counterinsurgency approach was applied to Al-Anbar Province's cities such as Ramadi and Fallujah, the al-Qaeda insurgency began to recede.

By the late spring of 2007 the Anbar Awakening had begun to arrive to the surrounding countryside and city of Fallujah. It was during this time that I had the privilege of leading our tribal outreach efforts to help Anbar's tribes turn against al-Qaeda and to see and admire the actions of Bill Mullen and Dan Green. Their book, *Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with al-Qaeda*, shares their personal stories respectively of serving as the Marine battalion commander in charge of the city of Fallujah[1] and the tribal and leadership engagement officer for a Naval Special Warfare unit. They both participated in and witnessed the turning of Fallujah from a perennial hot spot and symbol of the insurgency to an example of what could be accomplished in Iraq given the right leadership, experience, and conditions. In my opinion, it would be difficult to find two individuals who had a greater effect on the turning of Fallujah in 2007 than Bill and Dan. Their complementary narratives demonstrate that aligning the interests of the people with their government and enlisting the population in its own defense were instrumental to turning the province around. A balanced approach combining relentless pressure on the enemy as well as efforts to empower the Iraqis to defend and to govern themselves proved too

powerful a force for al-Qaeda to overcome. The great story of Fallujah's turning against al-Qaeda's insurgency in 2007 has not been fully told until now, and this is an important contribution not only to the story of Fallujah but to the greater battle for Al-Anbar and the broader struggle for Iraq. As al-Qaeda banners flutter today over some of our battle positions of 2007, it is more important than ever to commemorate and remember the sacrifices of our servicemen and -women and to recognize that their tremendous efforts led to success in Fallujah and delivered, through their blood and sweat, a potential future for the Iraqi people. Even though subsequent political decisions in Washington, D.C., and in Baghdad would reverse the fortunes of the people of Fallujah, nothing should be taken from the sacrifices of our magnificent troops during the period when Bill and Dan made such a difference. Indeed, their personal contributions, and those of our dedicated troops, produced effects and outcomes in this counterinsurgency campaign far out of proportion to their numbers. This central lesson bears remembering for the generations of Americans yet to come who choose to serve their country and renew their vows of support to our way of life and our nation's security.

Gen. John R. Allen, USMC (Ret.)

NOTE

1. Indeed, Lt. Col. Bill Mullen would command my old battalion in Fallujah, the storied 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, "The Ready Battalion." I relinquished my call sign, "Spartan," to Bill as he so superbly led this unit once more into the cauldron of battle in Al-Anbar.

|| Preface ||

The city of Fallujah, Iraq, will long be associated with some of the worst violence and brutality of the Iraq war. The battles to retake the city from insurgent fighters in 2004 have already indelibly carved the city's name into the historic annals of the U.S. military and occupy a revered place in the storied history of the United States Marine Corps. Initially occupied by U.S. forces in 2003, it eventually served as the headquarters for numerous insurgent groups operating west of Baghdad, including al-Qaeda in Iraq and its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, until it was forcibly retaken at the end of 2004. Once the city was finally cleared, U.S. forces concentrated on trying to prevent it from returning to insurgent control by waging a counterinsurgency campaign against both nationalist and extremist Islamist insurgent forces. It was a long, frustrating, and at times brutal fight for control of the population, with the eventual goal of setting the conditions for Iraqi government control and enabling U.S. forces to leave. Coalition Forces were winning tactically, but the initial policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which had deeply alienated the Sunni Arab population, made winning over the population a difficult process at best. Negative press coverage of the ongoing violence and the often clumsy and ineffective efforts of the developing Iraqi security forces added to the difficulty. The people of the area still strongly supported the nationalist insurgents, and although they often allied with the Islamists to push Coalition Forces out of Iraq, they were frequently more terrified of the extremist Islamist insurgents than supportive of them. There seemed to be little U.S. forces could do to change the situation. By the middle of 2007, four years after the initial invasion of Iraq, the city of Fallujah and its surrounding countryside remained mired in a seemingly intractable cycle of

violent action and counteraction between government security forces, assisted by U.S. forces, and the various insurgent groups. It was an unstable and chaotic time. It had even gotten to the point that some on the Coalition side were beginning to wonder if Fallujah was being lost all over again. All of this began to change in 2007.

Progress up to that point had been slow and difficult to assess, and it occurred in fits and starts. The hardest aspect of the counterinsurgency effort was maintaining a sense of enduring security for the population so that Iraqis would not have to live in constant fear of retribution from the different insurgent groups. Lacking an adequate Iraqi partner, this task was beyond the resources of U.S. forces in Al-Anbar Province—something needed to change. Beginning in June 2007, local security conditions in Fallujah were fundamentally altered due to a concerted U.S. pacification campaign in the city, increased cooperation from local tribes, and greater efforts by Iraqi security forces. This campaign took advantage of the tide of the Al-Anbar Awakening movement that was sweeping the province from west to east as the tribes in the area and the broader Sunni Arab community began to turn against al-Qaeda in 2006 and 2007. As this movement gained momentum, Fallujah's residents were waiting for it to push eastward to help them eliminate al-Qaeda from their own communities. Even though the local population had not yet risen up against the terrorist group, they were keen to do so and needed the help of U.S. forces. The campaign described in this book gave them that opportunity.

Our book, *Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with al-Qaeda*, rests upon the firsthand experiences of the authors who served together in Fallujah during 2007, respectively as the Marine battalion commander in charge of the city of Fallujah and the tribal and leadership engagement officer for a Naval Special Warfare unit. The Marine emblem signifies text written by Mullen, while the U.S. Navy emblem signifies text written by Green. They both participated in and witnessed the turning of Fallujah from a symbol of the insurgency to an example of what could be accomplished in Iraq given the right leadership, experience, and conditions. The book is not a retelling of the two major battles that occurred there in 2004, but rather focuses on the far less glamorous but fundamentally more important campaign that eventually won Fallujah and set the conditions for its transfer to Iraqi control. It is also not a story of how we did everything

right and an attempt to take all the credit for what happened there. We did not do everything right, and the credit belongs to many people, both American and Iraqi, who fought, bled, and died there over the years the United States was involved in the Iraq War. More to the point, it seeks to tell the “rest of the story” of Fallujah that occurred after the major battles there. One can only say that this process began in 2004 and continued throughout the difficult years between then and 2007. Fallujah is an enigma. It is hard to decipher and difficult to control, and the results achieved there in 2007 and described in this book came about only through the perseverance and professionalism of the tens of thousands of Marines, sailors, soldiers, airmen, and Iraqi security forces who served there.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this book is the hope that it will provide a sense of closure for all those who served in the Fallujah area or lost a friend or a loved one there. The fighting in and around Fallujah was the Iraq War’s equivalent of Iwo Jima for the Marine Corps. More Marines and sailors were wounded and killed within the confines of the city than in any other place in Al-Anbar Province. This fact certainly does not diminish the value of the hard fighting that occurred in other places, like Ramadi, Hit, or Al Qaim, but due to the attention Fallujah received here at home, it became more of a symbol for Marine involvement in the Iraq War than any other place. The enduring psychological and iconic value of this battered little city on the banks of the Euphrates will stand the test of time. Because the security of Fallujah had improved so decisively by mid-2007, it no longer merited coverage by the major news organizations even though it had an enduring interest for thousands of serving members of the military. This naturally left many people wondering what eventually happened there following the great sacrifices of 2004. This book will tell that story.

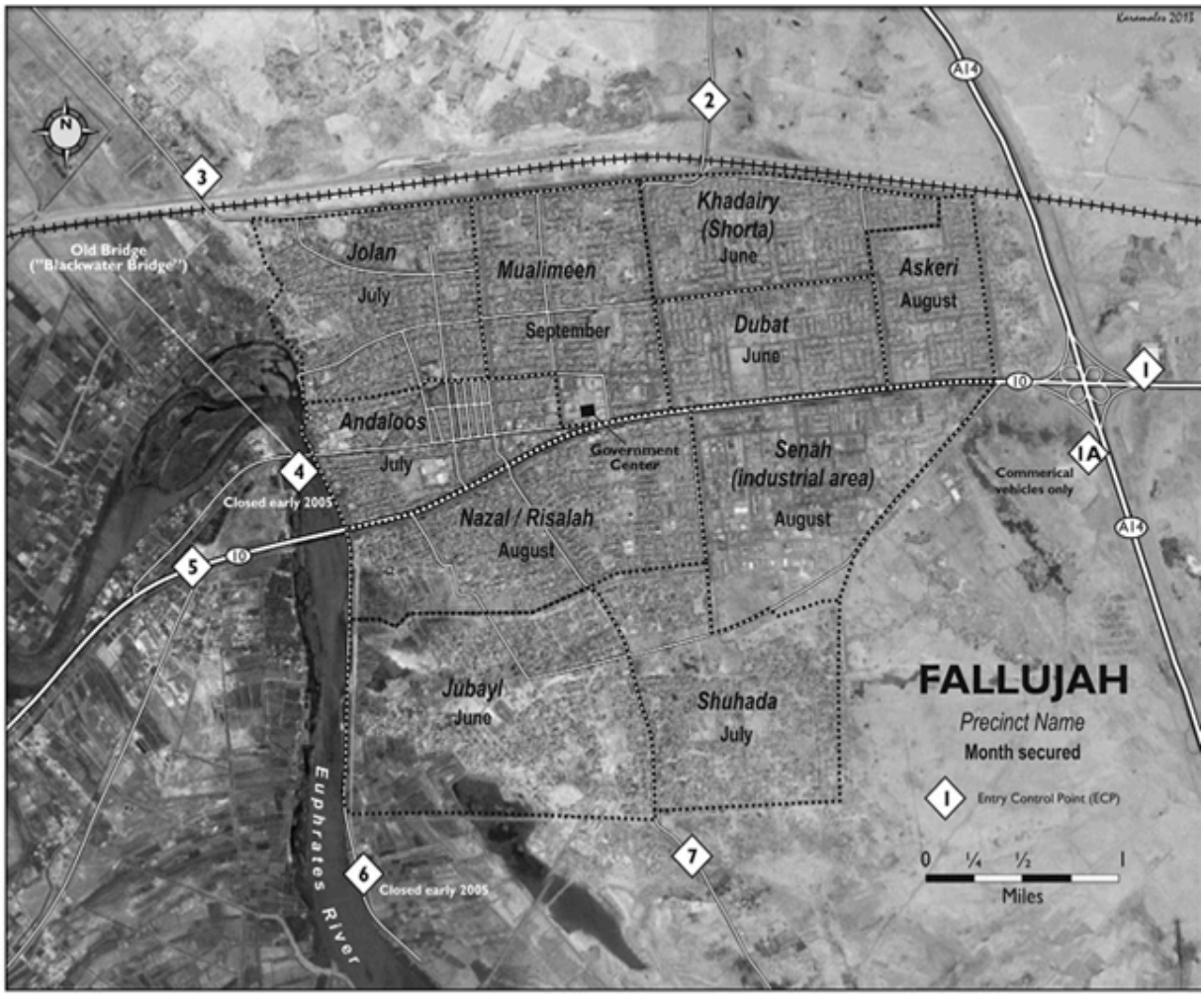
|| Timeline of Key Events in Fallujah, Iraq ||

March 31, 2004	Insurgents in Fallujah ambush and kill four U.S. Blackwater Security Consulting contractors. Their bodies are mutilated and hung from a bridge.
April 4, 2004–May 1, 2004	Operation Vigilant Resolve.
April 9, 2004	The Coalition Provisional Authority announces cease-fire in Fallujah after two members of the Iraqi Governing Council resign in protest of U.S. military actions.
May 1, 2004	U.S. troops withdraw to the outskirts of Fallujah and are replaced by two hundred Iraqi soldiers from the so-called Fallujah Brigade.
November 7, 2004–January 25, 2005	Operation Al Fajr (Phantom Fury).
January 31, 2005	Iraqi Constitutional Assembly elections.
September 15, 2005	Iraqi constitutional referendum.
December 15, 2005	Iraqi national elections.

January 11, 2007	President Bush's new strategy of "the Surge" is announced.
January 13, 2007	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Peter Pace releases the approved executive orders for the "plus-up" announced on January 11, 2007.
January 2007	New Fallujah police chief Faisal is appointed.
February 2007	Brigadier General Ali, new commander for Iraqi army brigade in Fallujah, arrives.
February 10, 2007	General David H. Petraeus assumes command of Multi-National Forces–Iraq.
February 14, 2007	The Baghdad Security Plan (BSP), with Operation Law and Order, is implemented, boosting security in Baghdad.
March 26, 2007	Ryan C. Crocker assumes the position of U.S. ambassador to Iraq, replacing Zalmay Khalilzad.
March 27, 2007	New Fallujah mayor Saad Awad Rashid Al-Dulaimi is elected.
March 28, 2007	Fallujah Government Center complex is attacked.
April 2007	Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team arrives.
April 21, 2007	Fallujah city council (FCC) chairman Sheik Sami Abdul Amir al-Jumayli is

	assassinated.
May 2, 2007	A meeting is held at Albu Issa sheik's home to rally two subsheiks.
May 11, 2007	FCC member Hikmat Jaber Ahmed is assassinated.
May 15, 2007	Fallujah mayor threatens to resign.
May 19, 2007	Mayor rallies city *muktars*.
May 23, 2007	Jumayli tribal leader is killed in Fallujah.
May 24, 2007	Car bomb kills funeral procession members.
May 26, 2007	Mayor imposes vehicle ban in Fallujah.
May 28, 2007	Mayor meets with Anbar governor.
May 29, 2007	Operation Alljah begins. First neighborhood (Khadairy) swarmed.
June 2007	Sheik Meshan returns from exile.
June 2, 2007	Marines raid al-Qaeda cell in industrial section of city.
June 2007	Jumayli tribal leader killed in city.
June 5, 2007	Mayor receives up-armored sport utility van.
July 2007	Iraqi army leaves the city.
July 15, 2007	Mayor hosts war widows.
September 13, 2007	Sheik Sattar Abu Risha, leader of the Anbar Awakening movement, is

	killed.
January 2008	Fallujah parade.
June 26, 2008	Suicide attack against Jumayli tribe and U.S. Marines in Karmah.
September 2, 2009	Albu Issa Sheik Khamis survives assassination attempt.
Summer 2011	Mayor Saad resigns as mayor of Fallujah following protests about a lack of public services throughout Iraq.
January 15, 2013	Albu Issa Sheik Aifan Saddun killed by al-Qaeda bomber in a suicide vest.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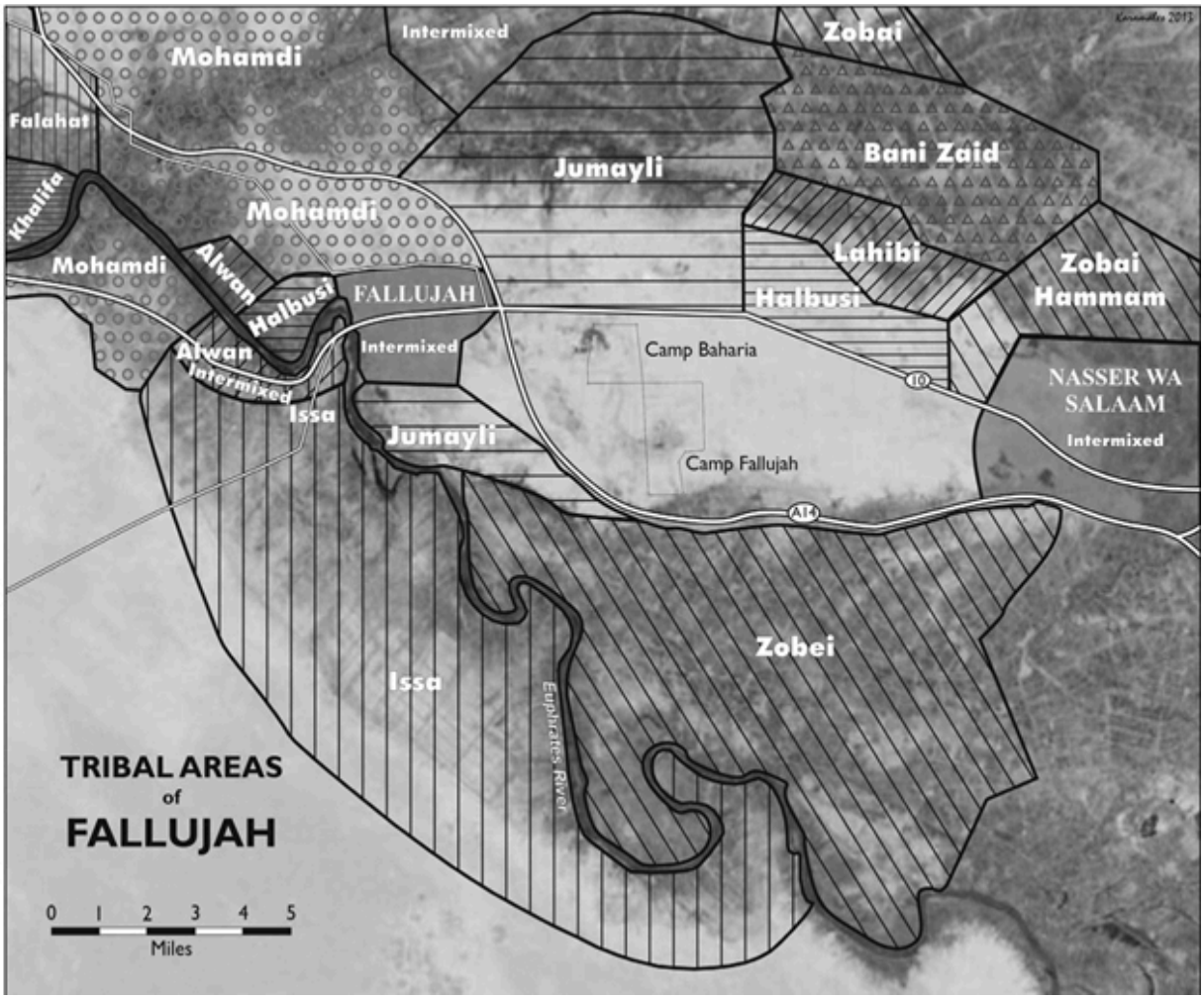
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|| Chapter 1 ||

The Stench of Death (Fallujah 2004–2006)

You must know something about strategy and tactics and logistics, but also economics and politics and diplomacy and history. You must know everything you can about military power, and you must also understand the limits of military power. You must understand that few of the problems of our time have been solved by military power alone.

President John F. Kennedy, June 7, 1961, at the U.S. Naval Academy Commencement, Annapolis, Maryland

Fallujah in December 2004 was a dark, dismal wreck of a town. It had been fought over since April, with much of the most intense fighting taking place during Operation Al Fajr (or Phantom Fury). Rubble filled many of the streets, and few buildings did not have at least some battle damage. Some were completely obliterated. Blasted concrete pillars jutted out from many buildings, with their severed rebar sticking out like brittle pasta. Power lines formed enormous bird nests of tangled wires at the top of the remaining power poles. Most structures in the city had clear evidence of being shot at by the various combatants: the black pockmarks of the bullets, the craters and spiral markings of shrapnel from rocket-propelled grenades, and the gaping holes made by tank rounds. Where aircraft had dropped bombs, there was merely a pancaked building. There were many competing smells that assaulted my nose during that time: the putrid smell of raw sewage, sickly sweet mounds of uncollected garbage,

and, on occasion, the sharp smell of cordite from exploding ordnance. But it was the cloying stench of death that caught my attention the most. As I moved about the town trying to get a feel for what would be left for us to deal with when our unit took over the area in February 2005, I noticed that while most of the bodies of dead insurgents had been removed, there was still evidence of some amidst the rubble—a foot sticking out here, an arm there, as well as small pools of sewage and other unidentifiable liquids. Stray dogs and cats wandered about the rubble, and most looked well-fed, from feeding on corpses. I observed one small dog jauntily trotting along next to a line of rubble piles with a blackened and shriveled forearm, complete with the hand flapping up and down in its mouth. Instead of the "City of Mosques," as it had been known before the fighting, it was now the "City of Death."

The heavy fighting was over, but there was still a great deal of mopping up being conducted. Squads of Marines were going from building to building to clear them of the last holdouts. This was an especially difficult task as the enemy would move around at night, which caused the Marines to have to clear buildings that had been cleared repeatedly already. It was a particularly nerve-wracking business since occasionally a family would be encountered. Most civilians had left the city before Al Fajr had started, but some had remained, hoping to protect their houses and belongings. The presence of these families meant that Marines could not lead with a grenade to clear a room. They had to actually enter and find out who was in each room the hard way. In some cases, it was an insurgent firing armor-piercing rounds. On the first day I was in town, a popular and charismatic Marine sergeant had been killed by one of these armor-piercing rounds that went right through the protective armor plate he wore over his chest. By the time the group I was with came up to the fighting, the Marines had pulled back and a tank was firing main gun and heavy machine-gun rounds into the house. Several Marines were lying in the street nearby providing security, and I could see a mixture of fear, fatigue, and despair in their eyes. They had been fighting in the city for more than a month, and they had just lost their squad leader, the one man they thought could get them through it all safely. Little did they know that the fighting they were participating in was only the start of a long process of restoring security and peace to Fallujah.

Seeing combat of this intensity for the first time in my eighteen years of service was more than a little disconcerting. I was strictly an observer gathering information to develop a plan for after the fighting. I could not actively participate except to defend myself, but I was watching Marines, some as young as my own son, who were fighting and dying. The visit I was on was called a Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS), something the leaders of every incoming unit conduct a couple of months before they arrive for their actual deployment. We spent the better part of ten days looking at both Fallujah proper and the entire area surrounding the city because we would be responsible for it all. I was the operations officer for Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 8, which, when we took over our assigned area, would have approximately 2,500 Marines and sailors, as well as about 2,000 Iraqi security force members working with us. The problem we faced could only be described as immense. How do you secure the results that had been purchased so dearly in the battles for Fallujah while trying to restore the entire area to a semblance of normalcy for the people who lived there—all on a time limited basis? Needless to say, it was a tall order.

In the time between the completion of our PDSS in December and the beginning of our deployment in February, the Marines who had wrested Fallujah from insurgent control had taken significant measures to restore some of the public services in the city. They also facilitated the safe return of its inhabitants by providing controlled entry to the city and humanitarian assistance to those returning. Their last official act before they turned everything over to us was to set up polling sites and provide security for the election that was held to select members for the constitutional assembly in January 2005. They put great effort into this, but it proved disappointing since the Sunnis of Al-Anbar Province boycotted the elections. The deployment for these Marines had been busy indeed, and they had paid a heavy price for their efforts. Over the year they had spent in the Fallujah area, they had lost more than one hundred Marines and sailors, as well as several hundred wounded. As we came in to replace them, we were

conscious of the price they had paid and vowed to ensure that Fallujah did not return to the terror sanctuary it had become in 2004.

We had developed a solid plan just prior to our deployment that would seek to capitalize on the success our predecessors had achieved. It was based on a strategy described by Sir Robert Thompson in his book *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. Essentially, counterinsurgent forces needed to clear a designated area of insurgents and separate them from the locals. Once the area was cleared, counterinsurgents had to hold it to prevent the return of the insurgents. In addition, steps needed to be taken to win the people over to the side of the government. The area would be considered "won" when the people there would not allow the insurgents to return and resume their operations because they saw the government side as the winner. In short, we called it the "Clear, Hold, Win, Won" plan. Fallujah had already been cleared and steps had been taken to hold it against the return of the insurgents. The surrounding towns all had some insurgent presence and would also need to be cleared and held, but hopefully not with the violence and destruction that had characterized operations in Fallujah. We knew we could go anywhere we wanted to, in strength, and if we telegraphed where we were going, the insurgents would clear out ahead of us instead of standing and fighting. The example of Al Fajr in Fallujah demonstrated to them what would happen if they stayed to fight. The trick was to hold the area against the return of the insurgents and try to win the support of the people for our efforts. Compounding this issue was that the residents of Fallujah did not trust American forces and were largely sympathetic to the insurgency. Our only options for trying to win them over were being patient, having perseverance, and keeping our promises. The time limitation was that our area had to be secure so the constitutional referendum scheduled for September 15, 2005, and the national elections to be held on December 15, 2005, would be successful.

The city of Fallujah and its surrounding area rest approximately twenty miles directly west of Baghdad. The major towns surrounding it, all of which provided staging areas for insurgents trying to get back into the city,

were spread around the compass. Three miles to the northeast of Fallujah was the town of Karmah. It had seen a great deal of fighting too, but it proved to be one of the hardest nuts to crack as an insurgent hot spot throughout my time in Fallujah. Five miles to the northwest of Fallujah was the town of Saqlawiyah, which was almost a bedroom community of sorts that could spark up at times but was mainly quiet; it seemed to be the area insurgents used to rest and recuperate. Ten miles directly south of Fallujah and across the Euphrates River were the towns of Ameriyah and Ferris. Ameriyah was a dirty, beat-up little town that seemed to be where local factory workers lived. Ferris, on the other hand, looked like it had been an upscale town. It had originally been built by Koreans in the 1980s to house the engineers and scientists who ran the local munitions factories. Both towns had seen some fighting and would continue to percolate with an insurgent presence, but they were quiet for the most part, especially when compared with Karmah and Fallujah proper. All these towns had to be secured and held to provide a secure environment for the upcoming elections.

Fallujah itself was a tightly packed, industrial city hemmed in by the Euphrates River to the west and the desert in all other directions. Highway 11 snakes around its northern edge from Baghdad and then makes its way to the border with Jordan. Its intersection with Highway 10 just east of the city was referred to as the cloverleaf. Highway 10 bisects Fallujah as it runs east to west and forms a natural border between the two halves of the city. The city was originally organized into ten neighborhoods, and the offices of the mayor and police chief were in the Government Center in the heart of Fallujah along Highway 10. The northern half of the city contains neatly organized homes, most with walls around them in accordance with Iraqi custom, and many of the residents there had been members of Saddam Hussein’s security services. The southeast portion of the city had represented the industrial heart of the area prior to the fighting, but when we took over, it was merely a jumble of decrepit warehouses, torn-up textile mills, and empty concrete factories, all with considerable battle damage. The southwest part of the city was less developed, and its streets eventually trailed off into the desert amidst a tangle of haphazardly constructed homes mostly filled with squatters. A railroad line that once linked Fallujah to Baghdad and other Anbar cities to the west framed the northern part of the

city, but the lines were cut and derelict the entire time I spent in the city despite efforts to repair them. Since trading played a significant role in the local economy, large numbers of auto shops lined Highway 10, with most crouched around the entrance to the city's old industrial heart. Many trucks stopped by during the day to refuel, make minor repairs, and for their drivers to grab something to eat. Prior to the discovery of oil in Iraq, Fallujah had served as the last stop for caravans bringing goods to Baghdad from the west, and it was a natural resting place for traders winding their way down the Euphrates from Aleppo in Syria. The tribes along the river cultivated large fields along its riverbanks, while the canals they carved channeled water to their crops and the vast palm groves that formed natural hiding spots for insurgents.

Our deployment started off relatively quietly and had much to do with the security enhancements our predecessors had put into place. They had walled Fallujah off through a network of dirt berms and watchtowers physically separating the city from the surrounding countryside. Practically speaking, this meant that people could only enter the city through firmly established entry control points (ECPs) manned by U.S. and Iraqi security forces. Moreover, a series of combat observation posts had been erected throughout Fallujah's neighborhoods to keep tabs on particularly difficult areas as well as to try to keep the roads free from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Most residents had been photographed and issued an identification card, and a census had been done of the city in order to control the human terrain. These data were incomplete as Iraqis continuously came and went throughout the area and many never returned after the destruction of their homes. There was still a significant IED threat throughout the area, but our main focus was on ensuring that the six entry control points into the city functioned efficiently and made it difficult for the insurgents to infiltrate back into Fallujah. These ECPs consisted of defensive posts, vehicle and pedestrian search bays, and control measures to prevent suicide bombers from approaching where Coalition Forces lived and worked and where Iraqis awaited entry into the city.

Those Iraqis who returned after the 2004 fighting seemed thankful that Marines had removed the terrorists from their city. It was clear from our initial discussions with them that the period from April to November of 2004 represented a nightmare for them. In their worldview, there were two types of insurgents: Iraqi nationalists, essentially the home team, and Islamist extremists, generally foreigners. The extremists had taken over leadership of the insurgency inside the city through their sheer brutality and the enforcement of sharia law. Their backgrounds were varied, but most were from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, and Chechnya. They had tortured or beheaded thousands of Fallujans. The evidence of this had been found by our forces in many different locations during the Al Fajr fighting. Marines came across torture rooms covered in blood, with the tools the extremists had used—such as hammers, saws, and electric drills—still present. The stories the Fallujans told were horrifying, and it was clear they were glad that that chapter of their history was behind them. They still favored the Iraqi nationalist insurgents, but what they were particularly unhappy about was the amount of destruction in the city as well as the large military presence, both coalition and Iraqi, throughout the city. They chafed at the restrictions imposed on their movements in and out of the city, but they reluctantly understood why they were required. Still, they did not want the extremists to return to take control any more than we did. Despite our efforts, several areas seemed to act as magnets for both types of insurgents; the Jolan neighborhood in the northwest portion of the city and the Al-Andalus section immediately to the south were particularly tough areas. They started off relatively quietly, but as our deployment went on, moving into and through these areas virtually guaranteed some form of contact that could range from a grenade tossed into the machine gunner’s hole on top of our Humvee, to the launching of a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at us as we drove past, to full-fledged ambushes combining grenades and RPGs with machine-gun and AK-47 fire.

One aspect that was particularly galling for the average Fallujan was the searching of Iraqi women at the city’s entry control points. This was necessary because insurgents were dressing up as women in burqas (head-to-toe body coverings, usually black in Fallujah, with a small opening for the eyes) or using women to smuggle in weapons and explosives because they knew we were reluctant to search them. The solution we developed

was to find female Marines or sailors who could work at the ECPs to search the local women and avoid inflaming Muslim sensitivities. This was a difficult undertaking because all the female service members who deployed to Iraq were assigned jobs. Using them for this duty meant taking them away from their original responsibilities, but it needed to be done. The hours were long, the heat was intense, and the duty was tedious, but that did not deter the military women who volunteered to perform these duties.

Other tasks that kept us occupied in those early months involved the rotation of Marine units into the area and helping their predecessors rotate home. We also continued to keep the insurgents in the area off balance through raids and sweeps to disrupt their ability to set up inside Fallujah again. We spent much of the first month or so settling in, getting to know our area, and concentrating on these activities. We also continued the planning and execution of civil affairs operations to restore electricity, sewage removal and treatment, and the provision of clean water and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG, used for cooking and heating) tanks to the city. As we set about these tasks, the size of the undertaking became more apparent and daunting. Mosques, which the insurgents used for defensive positions during the fighting, had been smashed. Their minarets had received particular attention as many provided ideal positions for snipers. The result was that many mosques had the ragged stumps of their minarets poking into the sky with jury-rigged speakers for calling the faithful to prayer hanging from them. Heavy vehicles or high explosives had crushed the lift stations for moving sewage out of the city, resulting in large pools of stagnant, putrid human sewage. Power lines formed crazy quilt patterns of severed wires hanging and dragging across many streets and alleys. To further complicate this mess, individual Iraqis tried to get electricity to their houses by climbing a ladder and hooking up their own power line to a light pole or business. I was always worried that one day I would see an Iraqi caught up in the wires and electrocuted, but it never happened as far as I know. The overall lack of electricity in the city was most evident at night when the inky urban darkness was profound. The damage Fallujah had experienced would take years to repair.

Another task that came with the territory was establishing security for the Iraqi government to pay damage claims to the people of Fallujah due to the fighting. Before we took over, our predecessors had instituted a process

for Fallujans to make damage claims to a board of Iraqi lawyers, who then reviewed the claims and set a time when they would be paid. We set up several different secure areas for such individuals to come and present their claims. I spent much of my time in these areas watching to ensure that all went smoothly, and it was an eye-opening experience as my first encounter with Iraqi culture. It was still spring, but the heat was building and it was quite hot when standing in the sun. The Iraqis would line up and cram together to get as close to the entrance as possible, as if they thought there was a limited amount of time for claims. Women clad in their head-to-toe black burqas were wedged in with the men and all were sweating profusely in the heat. Despite this, no one complained. Their patience and perseverance were amazing to me. There was no violence, and all proceeded through the security area. Not all were happy with what they had received in damages, but none vociferously protested. I could not imagine Americans being as patient and tolerant as these people day in and day out. The ability of the Iraqis to endure great hardship and persevere was impressive.

The first real test for our forces came in early April, just two months into our tour, when insurgents tried to break into the Abu Ghraib prison at the far eastern edge of our operational area. They attacked with mortars, machine guns, RPGs, and a suicide truck bomb, and they had other suicide vehicles poised to attack our forces that came to the relief of the prison. The first indication that there was an attack underway were requests from the prison security forces for our artillery units to fire on enemy mortar positions. We called the prison command center, and it seemed that chaos reigned there. The person I was able to reach on the phone was screaming for help and indicating that the enemy had gotten inside the walls. What had actually happened was that a small assault force, estimated at ten to fifteen men, had gotten inside the outer perimeter fence that a suicide truck bomb had blasted open, but the insurgents had been unable to penetrate the prison walls themselves. The attack almost had a Monty Python–esque nature as the insurgents attempted to open a door that had a Jersey barrier on the

other side to keep it closed. In their frustration, they fired their AK-47s at the door, but then had to settle for lobbing grenades over the walls and running away as our quick-reaction forces approached. We did manage to get those in the prison command center to calm down when we told them we had aircraft overhead and reaction forces closing in on the insurgents conducting the attack. The only parts of the insurgent force that made it over the prison walls, besides grenades and mortar rounds, were the legs of the suicide truck driver.

We knew all this because we had a bird's-eye view of the attack through our unmanned aerial vehicles and other aircraft we positioned overhead to help counter the attack. The Coalition Forces guarding the prison had several casualties from mortar and hand grenade fragments, but only a couple from direct enemy fire. Our reaction forces took no casualties despite being attacked by at least two suicide vehicles and being pinned down by direct fire from the prison's defenders themselves. We later estimated that the defenders had fired more than 36,000 rounds reacting to the attack. In walking the ground the next day, we could see the corpse of one of the attackers still lying outside the walls, while the positions the enemy had been firing from had piles of brass shell casings and some unused rocket-propelled grenades. We looked for blood trails or other indications that the insurgents had dragged their dead or wounded away as reported by the prison's defenders, but we found no evidence to support these claims. Much was made of this attack on the prison by both the enemy and our own news media, but the facts on the ground demonstrated that despite high volumes of fire and the coordinated efforts of multiple groups of insurgents, they never came close to getting into the facility to free their compatriots.

The weather grew warmer as spring progressed and enemy activity picked up throughout our assigned area. Small-scale direct firefights took place within the city limits, while our sweeps through surrounding areas uncovered several enormous weapons caches used to make IEDs and conduct mortar and RPG attacks. The reports that Saddam's forces had

stockpiled weapons and ammunition throughout the country in preparation for guerrilla warfare seemed true. In one instance, one of our battalions was conducting a search in an open desert area south of Fallujah near Ameriyah and Ferris, where reports indicated a large weapons cache. Just as the Marines were on the point of quitting their search, a Marine kicked at a lock on the ground as he walked back to his vehicle. The lock was attached to a hasp, which was attached to a trap door. The Marines described what they then found as a “Raiders of the Lost Ark” moment; the trap door opened up into a cavernous underground storage facility that held tons of ammunition and explosives. After pulling out all the weapons and equipment with intelligence value, our Explosive Ordnance Disposal Marines set up demolitions to destroy it all. In their estimation, they destroyed more than 19,000 pounds of ammunition in one enormous explosion.

We also conducted major clearing operations in the towns surrounding Fallujah, but these went quietly. In some ways, the biggest hindrance to operations was the heat. We were conducting patrols in vehicles and on foot wearing sixty to seventy pounds of equipment, weapons, and ammunition, while daily temperatures passed 100 degrees in April and rapidly climbed to over 120 degrees on most days thereafter. The record was over 130 degrees, and we hit it several times during that summer. The temperature at night was not much better as the terrain had absorbed all the direct sunlight and heat of the day and radiated it well into the night. On most nights, the temperature never went below 100 degrees. This oppressive heat continued well into September, and the inability to carry enough water to last more than a day limited our ability to conduct long foot movements or extended covert observation operations. You can be in the best condition possible, but such heat almost makes conditioning irrelevant. You have to keep pouring in water as it pours out your pores. Ice cold water never tasted so good!

Another major challenge was working with the nascent Iraqi security forces. A conglomeration of different types of Iraqi forces had been pulled into the area to help with clearing and securing Fallujah. Some were from the new Iraqi army, while others came from the Iraqi National Guard, which was being dissolved after proving itself completely incompetent. The worst by far were the Public Order Battalions (POBs), which had developed a well-deserved reputation as a sinister unit consisting almost entirely of Iraqi Shia. They claimed to have Sunnis in their ranks, but we never encountered

any even though we worked with them every day. The POBs had developed a reputation for preying on Sunnis and regularly torturing civilians, and some had been involved in soft ethnic cleansing in Baghdad. All these forces had American Marines or soldiers working with them to supply them, but our men also worked hard to root out corruption and to upgrade the Iraqis into a more professional security force. Unfortunately, thirty years of the horrendous example set by Saddam and his security forces did not wear off easily. Officers regularly skimmed money off the top from funds used to pay their troops, while soldiers frequently went home on leave, no matter what was going on at the time, and if they bothered to return were usually late.

The worst part of dealing with these forces, especially the POBs, was that they all wholeheartedly endorsed torture as a means of forcing information from suspects. We made great efforts to convince them they were wrong, but they would just smile, which always gave us the impression they thought we were naïve and they knew better. Things got so bad with the POBs that we actually began raids on their headquarters to free prisoners before they could torture them. They adjusted their brutal behavior by moving it to other locations to avoid our attention. We discovered this inadvertently when I and several others were on a night foot patrol and heard screaming coming from what we knew to be an empty house. We broke open the door and quickly secured the building. We found members of the POBs who had a young Iraqi man hanging by his hands from ropes tied to a hook in the ceiling. They had been electrocuting him with wires from the lights. We detained all of them, separated the man being tortured from the members of the POBs, and treated his injuries. The members of the POBs were turned over to their commanding officer with a stern warning that this sort of behavior could not continue. Needless to say, it had little effect. One of the highlights of this deployment occurred when these POBs left Fallujah for service in Baghdad. These were the same battalions who were later exposed for maintaining secret detention and torture facilities for Sunnis in the Baghdad area.

Part of resurrecting the services of a city is the resuscitation of the banking services so that people can get at their savings and have spending money to buy everyday essentials. This also provides merchants with sufficient paying customers to earn a living, which encourages them to open their shops. The problem was that insurgents and criminal gangs regularly hijacked convoys between Baghdad, where the money was, and Fallujah, where the money needed to go. Obviously, convoys carrying large amounts of money represented particularly attractive targets. This eventually led to a group of Marines and me flying to Baghdad to sign for millions of dollars worth of Iraqi dinar, then flying back to Fallujah with forty-five large boxes filled with the cash. This activity took us all night to complete as we had to load the boxes onto and off of the helicopters by hand, and then load them into a secure facility on Camp Fallujah. Once this was accomplished, we had to coordinate moving the money into the city and delivering it to designated banks so they could distribute it. We did not want to give the banks a single lump sum, so we had to make multiple trips. We had concerns about their ability to secure the money, and having it stolen would have proven counterproductive to say the least. It was also a bit incongruous for a time because, since I had signed for the money, I was likely the richest man in Fallujah. Naturally, none of this is ever something you train for, nor is it covered in any manual. It was all part of restoring stability, and we accepted it as such.

One of the most poignant moments of the year occurred on June 23, 2005. At this point we had a well-established routine for distributing female Marines and sailors to the main entry points to Fallujah on a daily basis to screen Iraqi women coming into the city. These females were volunteers and felt strongly that they were keeping insurgents out of the city. I could not agree more. Marines were especially determined to make sure those who volunteered could perform their duties as safely and securely as possible. Since there were no separate male and female sleeping and hygiene facilities at these entry points, the females had to be brought to a central location at the end of their shift so we could then move them in a

convoy out of the city to Camp Fallujah, which was several miles east of the city. The routes available for this convoy were limited because most of the streets in the city were close together and were frequently choked with civilian traffic or rubble. The main route into and out of the city (Highway 10) was a wide-open thoroughfare that gave the convoy's drivers and security Marines both room to maneuver and distance from civilian vehicles. For these reasons, we used the same route daily, but the timing of the convoy varied in an attempt to avoid setting too much of a pattern. None of these measures made any difference on this day.

It was early evening, and traffic along Highway 10 had dropped off as the convoy of female Marines and sailors moved out of the city. The vehicles were approximately five hundred meters west of the cloverleaf by ECP 1 that would enable them to leave the city when a vehicle pulled away from the curb, accelerated, and rammed into the side of one of the trucks. None of the Marines providing security had a chance to react. The seven-ton truck that was hit was immediately engulfed in flames and knocked on its side as the suicide car bomb exploded. One of the Marines riding in the back of the truck described herself reaching out to help one of her best friends as the truck tipped over. As she tried to grab her friend, she saw her bounce backwards over the side bench, disappear under the truck's side and be engulfed in flames. As the convoy's security Marines dismounted to try and save the occupants of the stricken truck, insurgents fired on them from houses on the road's north side. Four of the women in the truck died outright, and eleven were badly burned. Of the Marines who responded to the attack, two were killed, one as he helped to load a stretcher bearing a wounded female onto a truck for medical evacuation, while two others were wounded by direct fire.

While al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed credit for the attack, it backfired to a great extent because the people of Fallujah vilified the attackers for specifically targeting females. As for the remaining women, they went out again the next day to work the entry control points. They knew what had to be done, and though they were more than a little nervous getting back on the trucks to return to the city, they mounted up. One person in particular who helped them through this difficult time was our regimental chaplain, Lt. Cdr. Dale White. On the day of the attack, he spent most of his time at the hospital comforting several badly burned women, as well as those who

had been in the convoy but were uninjured. On the day after the attack, he rode back into the city with them in the back of one of the trucks.

As a counterpoint to this terrible event, there were instances of unqualified success. One incident in particular occurred on the peninsula formed by a loop of the Euphrates River immediately west of Fallujah. The only direct route (Highway 10) between Camp Fallujah east of the city and the nearest military airport, Al Taqqadum to the west, ran through Fallujah and down the middle of this peninsula. During late June, the insurgents tried to establish a large ambush site on this route, but they sprang the ambush too early. One of our patrols was making a security sweep down the road when the enemy opened fire, and the patrol responded with overwhelming fire. We had a sniper team established in a half-built house just to the south of the ambush area, and when an insurgent machine-gun and RPG team came into the same building to set up, the sniper team easily killed them. The final result was that we collected the bodies of twenty-two insurgents, while several more were spirited away by surviving insurgents. The Marines were unharmed from the firefight, while the only damage they sustained was scratches on their armored vehicles.

Of all the tasks of importance in Fallujah, perhaps the most difficult was the resurrection of Fallujah's police department. Prior to Operation Al Fajr, the Iraqi Interior Ministry had fired all the police in the whole Al-Anbar Province. Since restoring normalcy to Fallujah required the presence of police and the absence of military personnel, we had to rebuild the Fallujah police department from scratch. This effort had begun prior to our assuming control of the city when our predecessors had held a police recruiting event and sent all the new recruits to the Jordanian International Police Training Academy for six weeks of formal training. We received them on their return and helped them re-establish a police headquarters in the mayor's compound in the center of the city. We shepherded them through their initial steps of rebuilding the police department, and when they went out on their first patrols, it was eye-opening to watch the reaction of the people of Fallujah as their sons started the process of taking back the streets. The

people were so excited that they were throwing candy at police patrols and asking them to come into their houses for tea and meals. Fortunately, the insurgents ignored the re-establishment of the police and did not target them for attack until several months after they had stood up.

The real challenge was how to advise and assist police forces while inculcating in the Iraqi police a sense of service to the people of Fallujah. Prior to their being disbanded, the police had provided security by patrolling in groups or by sitting in their headquarters for twenty-four-hour shifts waiting for someone to call for help. We tried hard to influence them along the lines of current police practices in the United States, but our appeals fell on deaf ears. They knew how to police their city the Iraqi way and were not about to listen to Americans. The U.S. government had hired U.S. police officers to go to Iraq and work with the Iraqi police, but this program had mixed success. Some U.S. police officers were dedicated and brave, accompanying Marines to the police stations and working long hours and facing serious threats. Others refused to be exposed to combat or to spend much time in Iraqi police stations. Instead of badgering the Iraqi police to get them to improve, we decided to focus on small things to make them more effective. The downside was that as they became more effective, the insurgents began to target them. Before we turned our area over to Regimental Combat Team 5 in February 2006, the Fallujah police had already suffered many casualties. They patrolled in donated Toyota pickup trucks that were getting shredded by IEDs, and they were frequently the target of assassinations. The only limiting factor to this violence was that these same police were the “sons of Fallujah,” so each time they took casualties, there was a backlash from the population against the insurgents. While none of us would ever have called the police effective in an American sense, they were coping with the city in an Iraqi fashion and the results were demonstrated during both elections.

Fallujah’s leaders at this time represented a mixture of opportunists and brave men trying to make a difference. The mayor was from the city, but he seemed mostly concerned with establishing a personal security detachment

for himself and then ensuring that as commerce rejuvenated in the city, he had a piece of it. It remained unclear just how much influence he actually had, but he did not seem to be openly siding with the insurgents since he had been attacked once, we could only assume by insurgents, and had personally killed one of his assailants on his front stoop. But this was an isolated incident. The police chief, on the other hand, was from Baghdad and seemed to be genuinely trying to build a competent police force. He instilled discipline in his new recruits and made sure they were in uniform and patrolling as much as possible. There were a number of threats against his life and several attacks against him, but the closest we came to losing him was unfortunately through friendly fire when he told his driver to disregard the Marines waving at him to stop as his car approached a vehicle barrier protecting the mayor's compound. As rounds impacted his vehicle, he dove out of the passenger door and rolled away from the vehicle. His quick reflexes saved his life, but unfortunately the fire seriously wounded his driver and killed one of his close bodyguards sitting in the back seat. It took us a great deal of time and effort to restore his trust and confidence in U.S. forces.

The city council was a different case. It met on a weekly basis but served mostly as a forum for lodging complaints against Coalition forces. We knew it was heavily infiltrated by insurgent sympathizers, which made it particularly difficult to deal with. How do you hold a civil conversation with someone who has reportedly provided gifts to children to entice them to toss grenades into our vehicles? Or another who reportedly killed his wife with his bare hands due to a violation of his "honor," then killed his daughter because he did not want her to grow up without her mother? This individual was by far the worst due to his constant harangues against U.S. forces. The only value we found in attending these meetings was that it provided a sounding board for frustrated civilians and a finger on the pulse of the city. In a sense, we measured progress by what the Fallujans no longer complained about. Lastly, we began efforts at tribal engagement, but most tribal leaders had fled to Jordan during or shortly after Al Fajr, so there really was not anyone of influence to deal with on an extended basis. The exception was Sheik Khamis of the Albu Issa tribe who lived just west of Fallujah. He openly sided with Coalition forces and tried to bring his entire area around until a suicide vehicle exploded in his front yard in June

2005. When that happened, he decided that discretion was the better part of valor and left for Jordan.

Throughout the summer of 2005 we continued to make sweeps for weapons caches out in the desert areas to the north and south of Fallujah. Oddly enough, one of the most successful sweeps was conducted by a platoon of amphibious vehicles. The Marines in these vehicles were absolute bloodhounds as they went about rooting out insurgent safe havens and weapons storage sites. These sweeps were time-consuming and physically challenging in the extreme heat using armored vehicles without air conditioning. The teams would be out for days at a time (because they could always carry enough water) searching in the open desert. They had surprising luck finding these weapons caches. In one instance, they really hit the jackpot. They came across a run-down farmstead on the banks of a canal in a remote area well to the north of Fallujah. They searched the farmstead and moved on, but came back to it two more times because something did not seem right. There was brand-new farm equipment, a new generator, and other relatively new tools at this run-down and seemingly abandoned compound. On their third try, one of the Marines decided to bang on the cement floor of the main house with a five foot metal bar used to fix the tracks of their amphibious vehicle. He did this because the cement seemed new and did not look right. In one area, the cement cracked easily and it turned out to be a thin layer of cement over a trap door. They opened the trap door and discovered an insurgent command-and-control facility complete with new computers, communication equipment, and a system to vent fresh air into the underground facility. They even found a video the insurgents had made of their new facility, and it was evident from the video that the insurgents were proud of what they had built. Something else in the video was more disturbing. It portrayed a separate facility that was obviously a torture chamber and holding facility. You could hear the labored breathing of someone in the background as the insurgents filmed the room, then they panned over to an Iraqi who had his arms tied behind his back with a rope attached to a hook on the ceiling. The man’s arms were wrenched upwards, and he was just able to touch the ground. He must have been in excruciating pain. This was apparently one of the favorite means of torture by Saddam’s security forces, and it was imitated by insurgents and the new Iraqi security forces alike.

The Marines went looking for the holding facility and moved to an outlying building where they found a similar cement-covered trap door. Upon entering that door, they found the holding cell and torture chamber complete with the Iraqi in the video. He was from Ramadi and had suffered a great deal by the time the Marines cut the rope and freed him. He was effusive in his thanks for being rescued and told the Marines his captors were due back shortly and intended to kill him, but must have been scared away by the Marines. We referred to that man as the luckiest guy in Iraq. He made many promises to help identify the insurgents who had captured and tortured him, but when we sent him to U.S. forces in Ramadi, he could not remember what his captors looked like anymore. After his release, he never returned. He probably fled to Jordan like many other Iraqis from Al-Anbar.

Cache discoveries such as this also resulted in our finding videos that illustrated how insurgents handled suicide bombers to ensure they followed through with their attacks. We came across one video that focused on a good-looking young man who could only have been in his late teens. We knew it was common for the insurgents to smuggle these men in through Jordan or Syria and then keep them isolated so that they would not have second thoughts. In the video, the young man appeared to be talking with others at what we presumed was his last meal. He seemed happy and joked with those who shared the meal. The next segment showed him making his “martyr statement” dressed in insurgent regalia complete with an RPG, an AK-47, and the martyr headband. Next, he gave goodbye hugs to his “friends” who lined up to congratulate him and say goodbye. The last segment showed him behind the wheel of a large dump truck rigged as a suicide vehicle. He smiled and waved to the camera as he set the truck in motion toward one of our combat outposts. The camera followed the progress of the truck until it impacted with the force protection barriers around the combat outpost and exploded. Due to our extensive preparations to defend against just such an attack, he managed to injure no Marines and the damage was minimal.

That individual had at least seemed to be a volunteer. During this period the Saudi government released a video of someone who had not been a volunteer. He was a young Saudi man of about twenty who had decided to join the jihad in Iraq. The insurgents had smuggled him into Iraq through Jordan, and he had moved along the normal ratlines fighters used to reach

the fighting. When he arrived in his assigned area, he was tasked with delivering a car to another group of fighters. Unbeknownst to him, the car had been rigged as a bomb that was to be remotely detonated when he drove it past the actual target. Somehow, this young man had survived the explosion but was horribly maimed and his face burned beyond recognition. He was able to speak, though, and his message was clear: he was telling his fellow Saudis that they should not join the jihad and be duped as he was. The incident also demonstrated the ruthlessness of our opponents, who in addition to this technique were also known to rig suicide vehicles with chicken switches that would trigger the explosion if the driver had second thoughts and tried to abandon the vehicle. Another tactic was for a "coach" to accompany the suicide driver to get him to the target area and then leave the car shortly before the final run in to the target. Often we would get reports of the "coach" diving out of the vehicle at the last moment and running away immediately prior to the vehicle exploding. Thousands of impressionable, gullible Arab youths died in this manner—some by their own choice, some by subterfuge. The insurgents behind the network who supplied the bombs and young men never sacrificed themselves. They facilitated the deaths of impressionable young Arab men at little risk to themselves. Unfortunately, this sort of thing is not isolated to Iraq.

An excruciating and intractable issue began in early September and lasted until the end of our deployment. Insurgent snipers had begun to operate again within Fallujah, and they proved quite skilled. These types of attacks were always the hardest to deal with since they came without warning. Snipers are hard to spot, and there is no effective way to respond to their immediate attack because it is next to impossible to determine where the shot came from. To make matters worse, the insurgents were filming their attacks and posting the videos on websites sympathetic to their cause. We would receive copies of these videos and spend hours poring over them searching for clues as to how the snipers were operating. Watching your own Marines getting shot and killed over and over again was mentally debilitating, but it was absolutely necessary to determine ways to make

them less vulnerable as well as to catch or kill the snipers. We tried every means available to eliminate the threat, but they all proved fruitless. There exists an old saying that the best person to take out a sniper is another sniper. This did not prove so for us. We had our own sniper teams operating throughout the city, and we augmented them with other sniper teams during the worst periods, but no one ever saw a thing, let alone got a shot at an insurgent sniper.

Another tactic we used in an attempt to deal with the sniper issue was to pressure the city leaders to provide information to help us kill or capture the snipers. This also failed to pan out because there were still many in the city who supported the Iraqi nationalist insurgents. It was clear also that most citizens were terrified of the Islamic extremists, while the nationalist insurgents were considered to be the equivalent of Robin Hood. They were fellow Sunnis who were trying to expel the infidel invaders—us. In addition, they did not see the snipers as a problem for them. They were not being targeted, so why should they provide information? We spent hours trying to convince the locals that it was in their interest to side with the Iraqi government (which they claimed was all Shia, so they called them Iranians) or with us.

The closest we came to catching one of the snipers was when one of our patrols came across a vehicle rigged to support sniper operations. Just like the vehicle used by the infamous D.C. sniper in the United States in 2002, the back seat folded down, which allowed the sniper to lie flat across the seat with his head and upper torso in the trunk. The rear bumper of the vehicle was rigged with a wire so the sniper could lower it, take a shot through a hole cut in the rear of the car, and then raise the bumper back over the hole by pulling on the wire. It was ingenious and effective. We fingerprinted the car, then destroyed it, but we never caught anyone as a result of the find. Sniper attacks did diminish for a while, so perhaps we captured the one vehicle the snipers were using. Since sniper attacks began to occur in other areas, it was more likely that they had moved on, but they eventually returned and killed more Marines and soldiers. Of all the aspects of this long deployment, this was the most frustrating.

The major operation conducted during our deployment was the planning for and provision of security for the constitutional referendum on September 15, 2005. It was a massive undertaking, as polling sites throughout the area had to be identified, then secured against attack. Planning went on for months and the preparations were extensive. It was all aimed at allowing people to choose the way they want to be governed, which ran directly counter to what the Islamic extremists among the insurgents wanted. To them, sharia was the only way and elections of any sort were the equivalent of apostasy. How could man find a better way to govern than Allah? They threatened what they would do to anyone who voted or supported the elections, but it failed to have much of an impact. Thousands of Iraqis from across the province came out to vote.

What was even more surprising was that the government had imposed a nationwide ban on vehicle traffic for that day, so that those who voted had to walk to their polling stations in the heat. Moreover, only days before the referendum itself, the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) declared that no Coalition Forces could be in the immediate vicinity of polling sites. This was a serious concern because immediately after that declaration, the commission also announced that Coalition Forces could not provide security at the polling sites or move ballots, which we had initially agreed to do. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The fledgling Iraqi police showcased their abilities by mustering their personnel to provide security at each polling site and guaranteeing the safe transport of all ballots to and from the polling sites. The excitement among the police on the day of the referendum was palpable as they looked upon their new fleet of donated Toyota trucks, each decorated with Iraqi flags, poised to deliver ballots. One police officer told me that it was like the equivalent to our 3rd of July in the United States, the day before we declared independence.

Given these developments, the days immediately prior to the referendum were hectic, but on the day itself, everything went like clockwork. The Iraqis walked to the polling sites despite the heat. Once they voted, they dipped one of their fingers in indelible purple ink so that they could not vote again. They then exited the polling sites proudly displaying their purple fingers, which was a brave thing to do considering that the insurgents had specifically promised to cut off any purple fingers they found. There were a few instances of violence in our area, but turnout

was the opposite of the previous January's elections. The Sunnis realized they had made a mistake by boycotting the previous election, so they came out by the tens of thousands and voted. Though the day was tremendously long and busy, the results were satisfying for everyone involved, with only one exception: the Iraqi army. Stationed away from their homes, they were not allowed to vote in Fallujah. We could not help thinking that a large part of the reason for this was that the Iraqi army consisted mostly of Shia Muslims and they were trying to vote in a completely Sunni area. Not surprisingly, this did not go over well and we spent much time and effort trying to mollify the Iraqi army soldiers.

The next major event was the national election of December 15, 2005. Planning for this one was also extensive, but once again the IECI declared that only Iraqi security forces would provide security in the immediate vicinity of the polling sites. We were more prepared for the news this time around and so were the Iraqi police. The same vehicle ban was imposed for the day of the election, and though we were patrolling in the general area of the polling sites, no Coalition Forces came near them. The Iraqi security forces stepped up and did a competent job providing security. The population was impressed that their own countrymen were securing them as they went about their duties of citizenship. The turnout for this election was even greater than for the constitutional referendum, although once again Iraqi army soldiers were not allowed to vote. Given the high turnout, many Americans mused about the fact that despite the vehicle ban and threats of violence from insurgents, the overwhelming majority of voting-age Iraqis turned out to vote, whereas in America, where there are no threats and with every modern convenience to get people to the polling sites, turnout is generally below 40 percent of the voting-age population.

One of the last major casualty-producing incidents during this period occurred on December 1, 2005. The battalion that was responsible for the southern part of the city as well as the peninsula to the west was professional and competent. Its Marines mixed up the kinds of operations they undertook on a continuous basis as well as the timing of those operations to such an extent that they really kept the enemy off balance. But as the events of this day illustrate, an enemy who only has to be lucky once can sting even the best units. In this instance, a platoon from the battalion occupied a temporary observation post on the peninsula west of Fallujah.

Since it had been occupied once before, they took special care to search the deserted compound and used metal detectors to find anything buried in the dirt inside the building. In other words, they took every possible precaution. Once they had finished, they posted half the platoon on security. Since it was the first of the month and several Marines were due promotion, the other half of the platoon got into formation and the company commander promoted the Marines. As the formation broke up to go about their duties, one of the Marines stepped on a pressure plate and triggered what was estimated to be three 155-mm artillery shells buried deeply enough to avoid detection by metal detectors. The results were catastrophic. Ten Marines died and nearly all the rest in the formation were wounded. They initially thought it had been a mortar attack, but the investigation revealed what had actually happened. It was a truly terrible event that happened to a unit that did everything right, yet still got burned.

As we wrapped up our year-long deployment to the Fallujah area, we reflected on what we had accomplished. The population of Fallujah had mostly returned after the 2004 fighting, and many public services had been restored. We made a good start, but it would take several more years of hard work to get them fully restored. Violence—from rocket and mortar attacks to sniper attacks, ambushes, and IED attacks—still occurred on a regular basis throughout the area. Some IED attacks had been large enough to destroy tanks and Humvees. All but one of the Marines in the tanks that had been hit survived the attacks, but when a large IED went off under a Humvee, it generally killed everyone in the vehicle. Many of our tactical operations had been effective in that they killed or captured insurgents, but as I left the area, I wondered how much progress we had really made. In a counterinsurgent fight, if you are not clearly winning, then you are losing. Ties always go to the insurgents because they have less to prove and time is on their side. All they have to do is survive to conduct attacks that demonstrate that the government cannot provide adequate security. Such attacks also served to wear out the patience and support of the American public. It remained clear to me that the people of Fallujah were still

sympathetic to the nationalist insurgents and had little interest in supporting a government they saw as heavily influenced by Iran. It was more than evident to us that the task in Iraq was far from complete, and the biggest question was how long the American public would accept the casualties and cost of the war before the decision was made to pull out.

I had also learned a great deal during this combat deployment. I had been out on patrol three to five days every week and saw and participated in combat operations throughout the assigned area. I had received orders to take command of an infantry battalion when I returned to the United States, so I watched battalion operations closely to see what worked and what did not. One of the first things that stood out was that if the insurgents could not use their cars to conduct an attack and get away quickly, they tended not to attack. We often referred to it as a commuter insurgency, as the enemy was mobile. Curtailing his mobility meant curtailing his ability to operate. The insurgents were not overly brave fighters and were often lazy in that they used the same IED holes or ambush areas repeatedly—that is until we killed or captured them. We did not have much respect for them and often referred to them as the junior varsity when compared to the Viet Cong our predecessors had faced in Vietnam. Our opponents were fair-weather fighters who for the most part did not come out in the dark or when conditions were uncomfortable.

With regard to U.S. forces, in the year we had spent in Fallujah, we had eleven different battalions rotate into and out of our area. Some of these battalions were better prepared to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations than others, and the difference was the involvement of unit leaders. Those units better prepared had more involved leaders at every level, most of whom clearly understood the realities of COIN operations: the enemy is rarely seen; attacks are generally short in duration and designed to cause casualties and frustration; the people seem indifferent because they are caught between Coalition Forces and the enemy and are trying to survive, and lashing out in frustration generates more enemies. In addition, given the prevalence of suicide bombers throughout the area, escalations of force due to misunderstandings where innocent Iraqi civilians were injured or killed happened more often than we liked, and some units handled the results better than others. Investigations would be conducted and restitution would be made to the families of the victims. All did their

best to keep these things from happening, but in most cases, and despite our best efforts, they were unavoidable due to illiteracy (they could not understand the signs posted in Arabic) or language and cultural differences. It was important to handle these issues properly and promptly. If the Marines thought they would be the subject of a “witch hunt” if they pulled the trigger on an Iraqi civilian, they would hesitate too long and potentially let a suicide bomber or vehicle close enough to inflict casualties and damage. There were far too many cases throughout the deployment that illustrated that the threat from these suicide bombers was ever present.

Other observations I made were that units that took heavy casualties and became too defensive got a decided reaction from the enemy. The more these units tried to protect their personnel by going into a defensive crouch and ceding the initiative, the greater the number of enemy attacks. Unfortunately, this only reinforced the crouched, defensive mentality. Another trend was that units that stayed in their vehicles while on patrol instead of getting out and walking had the most difficulty as they could not observe well enough to spot IEDs effectively. They were also isolated from the population and had no chance to gain their cooperation against the enemy. Finally, Marines who were bored and frustrated because they did not understand why they were in Iraq, or what they were specifically trying to accomplish, tended to come up with ways to entertain themselves, the majority of which were counterproductive. The nearly ubiquitous presence of hand-held video cameras among the Marines and the availability of the Internet on the large bases where they could send their video clips in to YouTube or similar sites amplified this trend. Each time this happened, there was a very strong reaction from home and from higher headquarters, and a great deal of time and effort was spent trying to resolve the issue.

As I returned home and began preparations to assume command of my battalion, I knew that I had my work cut out for me. If we returned to Iraq not fully prepared to deal with the frustrations and realities of a COIN environment, we would merely contribute to the problem, not solve it. I was afraid that unless we could help stop the cycle of violence and counterproductive reactions, we would be forced to pull out of Iraq and not be allowed to finish the job that had been started. If that happened, all those who died in Iraq would have died in vain.

|| Chapter 2 ||

The City of Mosques

I have often found that when I was afraid, the best course was to advance towards the enemy.
John Bagot Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion*, 1948

"Fallujah." No sooner had my team leader uttered the city's name than a quiet thrill coursed up my spine, a mixture of excitement and dread tempered by a sense of responsibility. It was early 2007, and he and I were sitting at the McDonald's at the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where we were both finishing up our meals after purchasing some gear at the Post Exchange we would need for the deployment. The banal surroundings belied the gravity of where I would be going. I had been in the Naval Reserves for nearly four years, and while I had not yet deployed, let alone even mobilized, I had spent a year in southern Afghanistan in 2005–2006 working with the U.S. Department of State as a political officer to a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Although I was not technically a military veteran I certainly felt like one. The PRT, as it was known, mostly focused on working with local government officials in a province, in this case Uruzgan, with the aim of helping to promote good governance, development, and reconstruction. It had been an incredibly rewarding tour, and living in the spartan conditions of Afghanistan as one of three civilian advisers to a roughly one-hundred-

person civil-military team had been life changing. Most of my time there had been consumed by figuring out and trying to influence the tribal politics of the area, advising the U.S. Army's civil affairs team on how to engage the local population and work on development projects, and troubleshooting problems while fostering better governance. While the Taliban insurgency was more a nuisance than a daily mortal threat in 2005, by the next year, when I returned to the province for about six weeks in the summer of 2006, it was a changed and more lethal adversary. Gone were the brief potshots of a spent insurgency that operated in isolated valleys away from the population. The Taliban had returned with not only greater numbers of fighters and more lethal tactics such as suicide bomb and vest attacks, but with foreign fighters who brought greater bomb-making skills, sniper attacks, and improved morale to rally insurgent fighters. My relatively peaceful ten-month tour in 2005, which had focused on development, reconstruction, and good governance, was replaced with a full-fledged war in 2006 culminating in multiday firefights, several-hundred-man insurgent forces assaulting our bases, and thousands of war refugees. It had been a jolting experience to witness what I thought had been decent progress the year before being swept aside like a house of cards, yielding to a resurgent enemy. However bad it was, and it was bad compared to the previous five years in the province, it didn't compare to Iraq and certainly not to Fallujah.

My team leader then mentioned he had spoken to the U.S. Navy SEAL Team leadership, and they had decided that in light of my State Department background and my tour in Afghanistan, I would be best suited to work as a tribal engagement officer for Task Unit–Fallujah, a component of a larger SEAL Team. He mentioned there was a SEAL petty officer there who spoke Arabic and had been working with the local tribes in the Fallujah area to get them to turn against al-Qaeda and that I would be his replacement. It sounded like a fascinating challenge to work with the tribes of Al-Anbar Province while figuring out how best to work with the SEAL Team. My unit was deploying about twelve of us, a mix of officers and enlisted personnel, to Iraq for a six-month tour with SEAL Teams Seven and Ten. While the teams would be conducting a number of combat missions as part of Special Operations Task Force–West in Al-Anbar Province, they increasingly were undertaking nontraditional tasks such as working with the tribes and engaging in political activities with local Iraqi leaders. Like most

of the U.S. military, the SEALs were adapting their traditional war-fighting skills to the unconventional challenge of the insurgency in Iraq. While many SEALs adjusted to the new mission, many others didn't want to, and in this space between what the insurgency required and how our bureaucracies were organized, unique opportunities for unconventional thinkers were created for these nontraditional undertakings. I was deeply grateful that the ill-defined job of "tribal engagement officer" would be my responsibility. I thrived in unstructured environments where order and process needed to be established and an ambiguous position required clarification and action. Although it would be my first military deployment, my experiences in Afghanistan had prepared me for the tour ahead, and I had also learned from hard experience what was required for success in an insurgency environment, how the U.S. military operated, and the necessity of really and truly preparing for the deployment. Looking back, it is remarkable how ill-prepared I had been for my 2005–2006 Afghanistan deployment, both personally and professionally, and while I like to think I met the challenge, there are just some things you can learn only by actually going to war.

When I deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 I had received no training from the U.S. Department of State, had only partially read the book *Taliban* by Ahmed Rashid, and had a vague understanding of counterinsurgency that largely centered on making sure not to offend anyone and ensuring the support of the population through development projects. Iraq and Fallujah would be different and I needed to prepare. Nothing is more clarifying when it comes to one's priorities in life than the certainty of violence. Fallujah, and Al-Anbar Province more generally, had it in spades, and I was determined to immerse myself in the theory and practice of counterinsurgency, Iraqi tribal structures and behavior, and the Anbar Awakening, which was an effort by the area's tribes to turn against al-Qaeda. The idea of working with Iraq's tribes appealed directly to my sense of adventure, and it drew me in as part of that great tradition of Westerners losing themselves in the exoticism of the Middle East's barren deserts and hardscrabble Arab people. Like all enthusiastic amateurs I consulted T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, endeavoring not to cheat and only watch the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace*, which was a history of how the modern Middle East was created out

of the crucible of World War I, *Desert Queen* by Janet Wallach, which was a biography of Gertrude Bell, the famous British explorer who played a substantial role in shaping modern-day Iraq, and John Mack's *A Prince of Our Disorder*, which was a Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of T. E. Lawrence. I immersed myself in Fallujah's recent history by reading Bing West's *Without Honor* and tried to acquaint myself with the Arab way of warfare by reading John Bagot Glubb's *The Story of the Arab Legion* and then the incredibly useful books *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* and *Pacification of Algeria* by the French officer David Galula. My teammates and I practiced drawing maps of Fallujah and tried to memorize all the names of the neighborhoods and the local tribes. I was determined to be ready for this tour and longed to see how much Iraq differed from Afghanistan.

The U.S. Navy also put me through six months of training to become more tactically savvy as well as to improve my, as well as my team's, ability to integrate with the SEALs. I was already trying to figure out how the SEALs worked, always comparing them to the U.S. Army Special Forces or Green Beret units I had observed in Afghanistan. The SEALs were typically much younger than the Green Berets and, while similar physically, emphasized combat skills to the general exclusion of thinking about the war holistically. There were individual SEALs and some SEAL officers who did see the counterinsurgency struggle as it was and not as they liked it to be, but in the main the central institutional tendency of the teams was to conduct direct-action raids and conduct small-unit combat against the insurgency in addition to surveillance and reconnaissance missions. While this ability was absolutely necessary to fight the insurgency, it was not an approach that would allow us to leave Iraq any time soon since we would always be "securing" Iraq ourselves when we really needed to get the Iraqis to do it. Additionally, however careful we were in our combat operations, we would inevitably not get the right people on some missions and perhaps even injure or kill others, which would create more enemies. The real key to success as I saw it was to work by, with, and through the Iraqis, their tribes, police, and army forces and serve as sort of a catalyst for their success. In a way, it was a much humbler approach to fighting the war and also more effective. When I broached the subject of how I wanted to integrate one of the SEAL officers into tribal and

community engagement programs, such as having him cut ribbons at schools and engage with local leaders, his response was classic SEAL: “The only tribal engagement I’m interested in is two bullets to the head of an insurgent.” I figured I definitely had my work cut out for me to convince the SEALs of the necessity of working with the tribes and engaging in a number of tactical governance initiatives. I also had to win their “hearts and minds,” theirs as much as the Iraqis’, for these and other tasks in order to be successful.

One of the central lessons I had learned from my deployment to Afghanistan was that a host country’s sovereignty and the authority of its government are flexible concepts in an insurgency environment because both are simultaneously being established and contested. The insurgents target government officials but also use corrupt local leaders to exercise political influence to subvert the state’s goals. Additionally, how local governments develop can sometimes privilege certain groups of individuals over others, and it is not uncommon for marginalized factions to use violence to resolve disputes, violence that is then blamed on the insurgents. Finally, divining the will of the people and harnessing it to defeat the insurgency and support the government was our ultimate goal. To these various ends, I pledged myself not to allow local political behavior in Fallujah to inhibit the progress of the government, and instead of taking a hands-off view, which was common in Afghanistan for a long time, I wanted to shape local decisions through discrete actions on my own to bolster our friends and sanction our opponents. I wanted to weaponize politics and use it to defeat the local insurgency. I know this perspective sounds neocolonial, but the alternative is allowing bad behavior to go on, which hurts locals interested in a more peaceful future and prolongs the U.S. presence, in addition to possibly killing Americans as the insurgency persists. I intended to judge local political behavior by local standards and adjust my actions accordingly.

A second lesson I had learned was that because military organizations didn’t typically conduct good governance activities (outside of civil affairs teams, which were in short supply), and good governance was something many people were involved in but no one was fundamentally responsible for, I had to adopt my own strategy of working by, with, and through other U.S. military units. Although I was assigned to Task Unit–Fallujah, which

was a subordinate unit of Special Operations Task Force–West, I planned to sit at the Special Operations Task Force's headquarters, which was a stone's throw away from the Fallujah Task Unit, in order to marshal its authority for my plans. The next part of my initiative was to wear civilian clothes as frequently as possible to mask my relatively junior military rank of lieutenant junior grade and to take advantage of my positional ambiguity to exercise more influence with both the Iraqis and the U.S. Marines who owned the Fallujah area of operations. The next lesson I had learned was to be forceful and confident when it came to undertaking good governance tasks because military units needed to know the central role they played in defeating the insurgency, and I also needed to ward off others who, through no fault of their own, went through the actions of good governance but didn't think in terms of using politics to fight the insurgency. The final lesson I had learned was to make good governance an actionable item through detailed situation reports, honest and fulsome assessments of local leaders and government institutions, focused attention, and directly linking my efforts to security improvements in the area. In many respects, I was attempting to operate like an insurgent within my own U.S. military to leverage its great abilities on behalf of local leaders keen to fight the insurgency but not sufficiently supported by us. It was a tall order, and while I was certain some might chafe at my actions, I had learned that results matter more than egos as long as you have sufficient support, and that most people will defer to someone else on good governance because it's not considered as glorious an assignment as combat for most military units.

|| Chapter 3 ||

The Anbar Awakening

The tribe was a community which went on forever, because it was based on family relationship, not on the ups and downs of politics.

John Bagot Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion*, 1948

As I continued to prepare, I immersed myself in the Anbar Awakening movement, trying to understand its key personalities, the ways other U.S. military units had operated in the area, and the ways tribes were being used to fight the insurgency. The successful turnaround of Al-Anbar Province tentatively began in 2005 when Iraqi tribes along the border with Syria in the area of Al Qaim organized to expel radical Islamists from their communities.[1] This initial effort eventually spread eastward and became what is known as the Anbar Awakening. The tribes turned against al-Qaeda because of revulsion at al-Qaeda's heavy-handed tactics and conservative religious beliefs and because al-Qaeda had started to cut into the very lucrative smuggling business so many tribes relied upon.[2] They had also turned against al-Qaeda because their goal of ousting U.S. forces from Iraq, which had long unified Islamist and nationalist insurgent groups, began to shift. Though both groups continued to share the goal of removing U.S. forces from Iraq and reinstalling the position of Sunni Arabs at the head of Iraqi society and government, other

factors began to split these factions. The break came about as the prospect of al-Qaeda's "victory" improved on the one hand and the chances of U.S. withdrawal increased on the other following the November 2006 U.S. congressional victory of the Democratic Party. Because of the results of the 2006 congressional elections, insurgent groups started to ask themselves what Iraq would look like after the United States left and, more important, what role they would play in this changed political environment.

For the Islamists, this meant a religion-based state guided by sharia law with strict prohibitions on personal behavior, and to this end they unveiled a shadow government complete with ministry heads and government officials. To the nationalist insurgents, this vision differed markedly from their own evolving goals. For many nationalist insurgents, their ambitions were to remove the United States from Iraq and re-establish the status quo ante bellum with an ostensibly secular state. But as U.S. forces persisted in their combat operations, thus rebutting the argument of some insurgents that we were militarily soft, and as the predominantly Shia government persisted in Baghdad instead of fading away after determined insurgent assaults, these goals became more difficult to accomplish. Over time, the political goals of the nationalists shifted away from a rejection of the new status quo to a grudging acceptance of it and a willingness to work within the political structures of the government of Iraq rather than fighting it (although some have suggested this was just an interim goal to allow the Sunni Arabs to consolidate their forces and focus their attention on the "real" enemy: the Shia and Iran). A good indicator of this transition was the almost universal rejection of the political process by Sunni Arabs in early 2005, as measured by their low voter turnout in provincial and parliamentary elections, and their subsequent reversal and active insistence on elections and organizing political parties in later 2005 and in 2007. Within this shifting political environment, opportunities that hadn't existed in Al-Anbar Province and Fallujah became available. The population, which had long supported insurgent groups, started to turn against al-Qaeda. The challenge was identifying how to take advantage of this new development and having the right leadership to do it. Before U.S. forces could pacify the city of Fallujah, however, they needed to address the security situation in the surrounding countryside, where al-Qaeda's presence was still strong.

Strategies of enlisting Iraq's tribes against the insurgency were often dismissed as antimodern and anathema to the creation of a secular and democratic government. Over time, though, as the insurgency increased in its intensity and more conventional approaches were discredited, tribal strategies were given a fresh look. Tribal security efforts began to reach their fruition as a tool against Islamist insurgents in Al-Anbar Province in 2006. Although the tribes had attempted to rise up in 2005, a systematic and brutal murder and intimidation campaign by al-Qaeda and an inadequate response by Coalition Forces (CF) doomed the nascent revolt. Even though efforts had been made at the tactical level to engage tribes from 2003 to 2006, absent a decision from higher-level military leaders, dedicated resources, wisdom about the province and Iraqi society, and a willingness on the part of the tribes to turn against al-Qaeda, efforts by the CF were severely limited. But as the tribes started to turn against al-Qaeda in the western part of the province in 2006 and U.S. experience in the area increased, a new openness to ideas was created in how best to deal with the insurgent threat. Additionally, the right leaders with the right set of experiences were in place by that year to take advantage of this burgeoning movement, and they attempted an unconventional strategy that was fraught with risk but had the potential to completely change the province's security.

Several key players participated in conceiving and developing the strategy of using tribes against al-Qaeda. Most prominent among them were Ramadi-based Capt. Travis Patriquin (USA), who popularized his ideas through a simple and powerful PowerPoint presentation called "How to Win in Al Anbar," and Col. Sean MacFarland (USA).[3] Attached to MacFarland's brigade was a single Marine battalion that rotated every seven months. In late 2006, this battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Bill Jurney, who came up with a successful approach to securing his section of Ramadi that soon began to spread to the other sections of the city. Due to the surge in forces and the lack of a replacement battalion, Jurney's battalion eventually spent nine months in Ramadi, and their tour ended in April 2007. This battalion's ideas of securing the neighborhoods through a "clear and hold" strategy dovetailed nicely with tribal efforts to secure their communities. In Al-Anbar Province at large, Brig. Gen. John R. Allen (USMC) and his civilian adviser William McAllister supported these local

initiatives and incorporated them into general military planning efforts in the whole province. These collective efforts of engaging local tribes, beginning with the Abu Mahal tribe in Al Qaim on the Syrian border and culminating in the rise of Sheik Sattar Abu Risha of Ramadi, and pacifying cities through a population-protection approach, became the model for Al-Anbar Province at large. The hard work and imaginative leadership of these men, along with initiatives from other key U.S. military commanders and a changing political environment that made the tribes more receptive to working with the CF, facilitated an alliance that turned the province around.

The strategy for pacifying Al-Anbar Province's capital of Ramadi in 2006 and Fallujah in 2007 was greatly informed by the brutal suppression of the tribes by al-Qaeda in 2005. In general, two essential elements had been missing in 2005, and Coalition Forces sought to incorporate them into their future planning efforts. The first was that tribal leaders had not been protected from al-Qaeda and became easy targets for reprisals. The second was that Coalition Forces were not dispersed among the tribes in Al-Anbar Province in a population-protection posture. This approach, later applied to Baghdad during the Surge in 2007, was a dramatic shift away from a force-protection mindset, which put troops onto large bases and away from the people, and to a population-security posture, which somewhat counterintuitively saw security enhanced through living among the people and being dispersed throughout their communities. But the process of working with the tribes was dynamic and challenging and required not only cultural adroitness but the political savvy and ruthlessness of a ward boss. Additionally, even though a tribe may have been willing to work with the Coalition, its organizational structure complicated swift action. A key reason for this is that in many Iraqi tribes the paramount sheik, who is the recognized leader of his tribe, does not have absolute authority over his tribe. In fact, "[t]he Arab tribesman will accord theoretical and verbal respect to the old families of chiefs, but he will rarely accord them obedience in practice. He constantly opposes and argues against his sheikh [*sic*]."[4] Thus, many of a paramount sheik's efforts are focused on cajoling tribal members and appealing to their self-interest and loyalty to the tribe through persuasion and money. This is largely due to the structure of Arab tribes. As former British officer John Bagot Glubb, who had long worked in

the Middle East, observed, “The Arab tribe was, and in most cases still is, so democratic as to be almost entirely lacking in discipline. The ordinary tribal shaikh [*sic*] has no power to enforce compliance with his decisions. Tribal law is, therefore, based on the absence of any central authority, and hence on the absence of punishment.”[5] Due to these aspects of Iraqi tribes, the tribal engagement strategy that Coalition Forces pursued was highly complex and operated not only along security lines but also with simultaneous political, development, and diplomatic tracks.

The general approach to tribal engagement taken in Anbar was to help bolster the traditional authority structures of the tribes in order for them to re-establish social control over military-age males in their tribes, who were the ready pool of recruits for al-Qaeda. A key strength of using the tribes was that because their members were related, they were more confident that outside al-Qaeda infiltrators would be detected because tribal loyalty would limit the appeal of Islamist ideology. Additionally, because the tribesmen were protecting their home communities, they had an intimate knowledge of the terrain and its people along with a strong motivation to do the work out of simple self-interest. Before this could be attempted, though, Coalition Forces needed to undertake an exhaustive analysis of the human terrain in order to determine who was a paramount sheik, a subsheik, or a fake sheik. As Glubb wisely observed from his experiences with Arab tribes in Iraq and Jordan, “An Arab tribe is usually full of rival claimants to leadership, family feuds and jealousies. Informers are only too willing to give malicious reports against their fellows.”[6] As information was gathered on the tribes and a more complete picture of the area developed, efforts were then made to establish the settlement patterns of the tribes, their primary means of revenue, and their relationships with other local leaders, the government, and, where possible, al-Qaeda.

Once this was done, and it often took many months if not years of determined work to accomplish, a concerted effort was then made to improve the *wasta* of the paramount sheik, which is a rough measure of his personal prestige and standing in the community, so that he could persuade subtribal members to support the government. To this end, once a paramount sheik had been identified and had expressed a willingness to move against al-Qaeda, U.S. forces would bolster the sheik’s position in the

tribe through lucrative civil-affairs contracts, time and attention, and his integration into military planning. These efforts by the Coalition allowed the paramount sheik to hold out the promise to subtribal leaders that if they rallied to his personal banner and rejected al-Qaeda, he would be able to provide financial benefits to their family members, predominantly through CF contracts, jobs, employment with Provincial Security Forces (PSF), which were tribal protective forces, and an enhanced position in the community. These efforts were taking advantage of a shift in the perception of the community away from the insurgency, and the prestige this sometimes conferred on its members, and toward Iraqi security forces and their promise of sustained employment and community-supported efforts. These goals were facilitated through regular contact with the paramount sheiks, many of whom had fled Iraq to Jordan and Syria in 2005, and through regular liaison with their local points of contact.

While this political track was moving forward, the security track was also being developed. Regardless of how committed the paramount sheik was to working with U.S. forces, his physical security and that of his family were always under threat from al-Qaeda, as was amply demonstrated in 2005. Because of these security concerns, the paramount sheik usually designated someone to work as his local security point of contact. In the case of Fallujah, this turned out to be a nephew of one paramount sheik, Sheik Khamis of the Albu Issa tribe, and a former Air Force general in the Iraqi military for another tribe called the Jumayli. This man was tasked with developing a security plan for the sheik and with collecting the names of trusted tribesmen who could be relied upon to provide security for their tribal area. A key benefit of having the paramount sheik determine who would be trained as a member of the PSF is that it allowed him to pick people who would be personally loyal to him, allowing him to further consolidate his control over the tribe. Additionally, the security chief would craft the security strategy for his tribe, in collaboration with U.S. forces, and make sure his men manned their checkpoints, received sufficient water and food, and were properly led and paid.

Coalition Forces worked closely with these tribal security representatives and, with their collaboration, selected at least fifty men at a time for week-long security training from the U.S. Marines and Special Operations Forces. Each class was screened, its information entered into a

biometric database, and officially registered with the Ministry of Interior. The police recruits would then receive training in small arms, rudimentary tactics, and police methods and would be given an AK-47, ammunition, a helmet, a bulletproof vest, a uniform, and radios. Additionally, each tribe received one or two up-armored Ford trucks. The general plan was to provide these tribesmen with enough firepower to protect their home areas but not enough to go on the offensive against other tribes. Once the training was complete, the men became officially sanctioned Provincial Security Forces or Indigenous Counterinsurgency Forces (ICF), pulling a regular salary from the government. This program acted like an employment sponge on unemployed military-age males and provided them with positions of respect in their communities. It alone contributed significantly to a reduction in al-Qaeda recruits due to people simply having a job. A different tribe was cycled through the training pipeline each week to provide a balance of forces between the local tribes. Once enough of these men were trained and the paramount sheik's home or village was protected, the sheik would return from exile in Syria or Jordan to rally his men against al-Qaeda. Typically, U.S. forces would create a security bubble around the sheik's home by erecting checkpoints and berming off areas to allow the PSF to resist any complex attack from al-Qaeda.

Once the paramount sheik had returned from exile, U.S. forces continued to enhance his *wasta* through repeatedly facilitating public demonstrations of his influence. Members of the Coalition Forces would often go to the sheik's home, provide an increasing number of civil affairs projects such as clinics, community centers, and other public infrastructure, and promptly respond to his complaints. This was often done with subsheiks in the room in order to show them how much influence the paramount sheik had with Coalition Forces. As the subsheiks came around with the future prospect of contracts on their minds and employment for their men in the PSF, we would work more closely with them to identify al-Qaeda targets, locate arms caches, and receive information of intelligence value. A key goal of having newly reconciled tribal members participate in military operations against al-Qaeda was that it created a blood feud between the reconciling member and his old al-Qaeda acquaintances. This was a necessary step for the tribal member to be fully integrated back into the tribe. As security increasingly became the norm in the tribal areas, a

special effort was then made to integrate the tribe's leaders into the political process and formal government channels. This was done by providing them with rides to meetings with government leaders at the city, provincial, and national levels and facilitating introductions to local officials.

When U.S. forces units rotated in Fallujah in spring 2007, this program was already well developed, resourced, and under way. The first paramount sheik from the area, Sheik Khamis, whose tribe was largely concentrated west of Fallujah along the Euphrates River, had returned in late 2006. And even though there had been an initial attempt by al-Qaeda to simultaneously kill him and entice him over to their side, he remained a steadfast, though always conditional, ally of the Coalition. In late spring 2007, he was still undertaking a process of consolidating his influence with the subsheiks of his tribe, but security incidents had already plummeted in his area. The next target of Coalition operations was to encourage the paramount sheik of the Jumayli tribe to return from his self-imposed exile in Jordan and organize his tribe, which straddled the area north of Fallujah. Using the Albu Issa sheik and others as intermediaries, U.S. forces were optimistic that the sheik would return provided the right security conditions were established. To facilitate this process, there were plans in the works to bring additional Marines into the area as part of the surge to clear out areas that had historically been held by the insurgents and were now ready to be held by the tribes. A key target for these operations was a substantial area surrounding the Jumayli tribal territory near Lake Thar Thar, about sixty miles north of Fallujah, that had not seen a sustained Coalition presence. This internal safe haven had provided al-Qaeda with a base of operations to store weapons and explosives, torture kidnapped Iraqis, and rest and recuperate as well as pressure the tribes north of Fallujah. Although I was working for the SEAL Task Unit in Fallujah, I was pretty much on my own when it came to figuring out how to actually do the job of "tribal engagement officer," and since the SEALs and I didn't "own" any real estate in the area, because it was run by the U.S. Marines, I definitely had to be adept at using the few resources I had to accomplish my goals.

In early April 2007 our Chinook helicopter churned forward in the vast blackness of nighttime Al-Anbar Province just after leaving Al Taqqadum airbase in western Iraq en route to Camp Fallujah, nestled in the desert just east of the city. My colleagues and I were ensconced along the helicopter's sides, shifting uncomfortably in our body armor and helmets as our sea bags and other gear, piled high in the center of the aircraft, precariously leaned in one direction and then in another as the Chinook shifted its flight path. I cradled my M-4 rifle in my lap with the barrel facing downwards, snatching furtive glances out the helicopter's windows and ramp at the unending nighttime desert, whose midnight blue was punctuated by the occasional buzzing fluorescent light of an isolated Iraqi home. As we approached Fallujah from the west, the vague outline of the city became clearer. A small jumble of city lights and the dark forms of abandoned buildings set it apart from the inky vastness of the desert, and as we passed by it to the north, our final destination of Camp Fallujah presented itself. It was shrouded in darkness as a precaution against drawing mortar or rocket fire, and our helicopter set down with a jolting finality. As best we could, we shuffled out of the Chinook with all our gear for the six-month deployment, with the dry smell of disturbed sand churned by the helicopters in our noses and its acrid taste in our mouths. As we moved back and forth to the edge of the flight line, hauling our gear and waiting for in-processing to begin, the heated exhaust of the helicopter buffeted us and the sharp whine of the engines drowned out all our senses. We had finally arrived in Fallujah after six months of training. It was April 6, 2007, and it was time to get to work.

We were met by a small commuter shuttle the Special Operations Task Force used to ferry people around the base, and we eventually arrived at a smaller base within Camp Fallujah's perimeter called Camp Shane Patton. It was named after one of the SEALs who had died in a Chinook that had been shot down in Afghanistan in June 2005 as it tried to extract a SEAL surveillance and reconnaissance team. That team had been ambushed by insurgents, and its story is well known from the book *Lone Survivor* by Marcus Luttrell, a former U.S. Navy SEAL petty officer. The base was set along the eastern part of Camp Fallujah, away from all the Marine Corps units and surrounded by an empty desert, with only the outer perimeter wall as the most distinguishing local feature. Other than a nearby rifle range, it was all by itself. Its own perimeter was a mix of dirt-filled Hesco baskets

(wire and fabric containers that arrive lying flat but are assembled and filled with sand or dirt to absorb blasts and bullets) stacked in twos and threes with concertina wire atop them along with a series of twenty-foot-high concrete walls at the entrance with a large metal rolling gate. Our commuter shuttle creaked along over the uneven dirt entrance to the base, and we eventually established ourselves for the night in a transient tent filled with cots and not much else. After a brief night of uneven sleep, I began the new day keen on getting my bearings, establishing myself, and diving into the business at hand.

Camp Patton was divided into two main sections. The first was the eastern portion of the base where SEAL Task Unit–Fallujah was set up, which focused its activities exclusively on the city of Fallujah and the surrounding area, and the second area was where Special Operations Task Force–West (SOTF-W) was located, which was in charge of all the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy Special Operations Forces in Al-Anbar Province. The task force was led by a U.S. Navy SEAL commander who was also in charge of SEAL Team Seven, and the Task Unit was led by a U.S. Navy SEAL lieutenant commander from SEAL Team Ten. It was customary for the "teams," as the SEALs are referred to, to have one full SEAL Team from either the west or east coast lead a SOTF and an element from a SEAL Team from the opposite coast attached to it. The goal was to spread the knowledge of current combat operations as evenly as possible among both coasts so teams could be better prepared to deploy when their time came. The remaining area of Camp Patton contained housing, a maintenance area, parking, and a plethora of generators constantly humming away and disgorging their exhaust into the air. I moved all my gear from the transient tent to a prefabricated housing unit where I would be staying the rest of the tour. The room had its own air conditioning unit, a door that locked, a couple of small windows, a mattress, and a closet, all of which I viewed as great luxuries from my perspective of having served in Afghanistan. My working uniform was a khaki and brown desert camouflage uniform or DCU, and along with it I sported a not-too-impressive mustache to respect local Iraqi culture. My chief goals were to get into civilian clothes as soon as possible, figure out how I could get an office at SOTF-W, and get on to missions going into the city and possibly the surrounding countryside. In other words, getting to work.

The offices for SOTF-W were located in a large khaki-colored half-cylindrical tent shaped into an “X.” Cooling air was constantly pumped into it, giving the whole place a wind tunnel feel, and the building looked as if it were a part of a colony on Mars. I fully intended to work there instead of at the Task Unit because I suspected that as I got out and about working with the tribes and trying to navigate the politics and personalities of the Marines as well as the SEALs, I would need the political cover of the SOTF’s commander. To this end, I grabbed an unoccupied desk in a common area and set up shop. My next task was to meet the SEAL who had been conducting most of the tribal engagements in the area. I asked around and finally located him after a few days when he had come back to Camp Patton after being in and around the Fallujah area. Like many U.S. Navy SEALs, Joe prided himself on the technical proficiency and bravery he brought to waging war. He had previously served in Fallujah in 2004 and had numerous tours under his belt, but unlike many of his Naval Special Warfare brethren, Joe had an unyielding interest in Arab culture and language. Inspired by the great tragedy of the Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon in the 1980s, Joe sought to learn about Arab culture in order to better serve his country and to defeat America’s enemies. He acquired Arab-language proficiency through dedicated schoolwork and on-the-job training, and he used it to good effect throughout the Middle East and in Fallujah in particular. With his thick, bushy mustache, gregarious nature, and stocky build, Joe reminded me of a midlevel Baathist politician on the make. As a petty officer in the U.S. Navy his rank would have normally prevented him from participating in the tribal engagement efforts of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), but Joe had leveraged his unique skill sets and personality to great effect. He regularly traveled to Jordan with Brigadier General Allen, who was in charge of working with the tribal sheiks, to entice them to return home to rally their communities. He always joined the Marines on their patrols into the city, frequently manning the gun turret, constantly looking for the next ambush. His deep knowledge and experience of bringing the tribes over to the Coalition side had a more decisive effect on the city than a thousand direct-action raids on targets in the middle of the night. It was going to be a tall order to replace him, but I figured that with the tribal engagement program well under way and my skill sets being more political in orientation, it seemed a natural transition

from his activities to my own. As security became more enduring in the Fallujah area, politics would take on added importance. Joe and I agreed to meet in a few days so he could “dump” his treasure trove of knowledge about the Fallujah area on to me as well as, I suspected, to check me out to make sure I was up to snuff. He then offered to take me to a weekly meeting the Marines held to review the week’s events, with a particular emphasis on political issues in the Fallujah area, and to introduce me around. I was incredibly grateful to have such an able colleague who would prepare me well for the tour. In the meantime, I intended to become better acquainted with Camp Fallujah and to continue to prepare for my first mission.

Camp Fallujah was a sprawling former Iraqi military base ostensibly used to house and train a dissident military group supported by Saddam Hussein that was focused on the overthrow of the Iranian government. There were a number of decrepit khaki-colored office buildings on the premises interspersed with an odd assortment of palm trees divided up by paved roads and trash-covered sand hills. An exterior concrete wall enveloped the whole base, and a small village of prefabricated housing units had been erected for the Marines to live in, for additional office space, and for dining facilities and small shops. Less than half a mile away to its north stood Camp Baharia. This base had far more ominous origins. Enclosed within its walls was an aquatic oasis set amid the desert, with small bungalows for families to enjoy the multifingered lake fed by water diverted from the Euphrates River. The “camp” had reportedly been constructed at the direction of Saddam Hussein’s two sons, Uday and Qusay, to be variously used as a retreat for them and their friends as well as Baath Party leaders. Other rumors also swirled around the bucolic settings. It was thought that a significant number of bodies had also been dumped into the lake, most of them Iraqi women used by Uday for his pleasures and then thrown unceremoniously into the water. Interestingly, it was discovered just three months before I had arrived in Fallujah that several dozen gold bars had been dumped in the lake during Saddam’s days, which prompted some wild speculation about what else was contained in the lake’s murky vastness. Far less glamorous but fundamentally more important, Camp Baharia housed 2nd Battalion 6th Marines, which was ostensibly in charge of security in the city of Fallujah. I would work very closely with

this unit as the deployment progressed and was determined to link up with them in some manner.

Joe and I made our way to the main headquarters of the Marine Corps at Camp Fallujah, which was known as Regimental Combat Team 6, led by a full-bird colonel named Richard L. Simcock II. His command presided over three Marine battalions in the area: 2/6 was in charge of the city and was led by Lt. Col. Bill Mullen, 3/6 had responsibility for the area west of Fallujah and the Euphrates River and was led by Lt. Col. Jim McGrath, and the final battalion, 2/7, led by Lt. Col. Joe Letoile, was charged with securing the areas south, east, and north of the city of Fallujah, which, though geographically large, were sparsely populated. Several other Marines were there as well, including the mentoring team for the Iraqi army, civil affairs representatives, and logistical and intelligence personnel. Colonel Simcock was an imposing figure who stood at 6'2" and had an inverted triangle physique. While his physical presence was impressive, he was also adept at handling the political scene with the Iraqis from having previously served a stint as head of congressional relations for the U.S. Marine Corps in Washington, D.C. The mere fact that he allowed Joe and me to attend his meetings signaled his recognition that a greater team effort was required to deal with Fallujah’s problems. Joe’s Arabic skills and fighting demeanor had clearly won over the Marine leadership, and although he was a petty officer, he was part of the greater effort, thus his preference for civilian clothes made his unconventional position more palatable for more military-minded people.

We assembled along a large rectangular wooden table with Simcock at the front surrounded by a bevy of floor-to-ceiling satellite image maps of the Fallujah area. Joe sat at the far end of the table in a rough assemblage of civilian clothing while I took a wall seat along with most of the other Marines. A key topic of conversation was the newly reconstituted Fallujah city council, which after years of neglect, corruption, and inactivity, not to mention assassinations, had been reassembled in an election in late March. Simcock was optimistic that the city council would be much more active than its predecessor and that the new mayor and the able activities of the city’s police chief would have a really positive effect on the security and governance conditions of the city. There was a general expression of agreement about this sentiment as the Marine leaders nodded their heads. It

was known, however, that no matter how well-intentioned the members of the new city council and mayor were, the violence of Fallujah was real and the insurgents would not easily leave the city. Discussions also ranged about the qualities of the new mayor and his origins, about how most people didn't know anything about him although there was some discussion that he was linked to the police chief in some way, as well as how the tribes were doing in the area. There was also a brief mention that the first city council meeting was scheduled to take place that week at the Fallujah Development Center, a small base outside of both Camps Fallujah and Baharia along the road to the highway cloverleaf leading to the city of Fallujah. I definitely had to get to this meeting. Joe next introduced me to the group, mentioning that I would be his replacement, and said I would be the new Naval Special Warfare representative to these weekly governance meetings. My presence was acknowledged and business continued. My quick impression of the group was that all the Marine officers had a commanding presence; they were all easily above six feet tall, including Simcock, Mullen, and the executive officer of Regimental Combat Team 6, Lt. Col. John Reeve. The men were serious, competent, and keen to have an enduring impact on Fallujah during their rotation. It was clear that Joe was regarded as a member of the group, and his opinions about the tribes and other events going on in the city were valued. I definitely had my work cut out for me, but before I could go to the Fallujah city council meeting Joe wanted to speak with me first.

Later that day Joe and I had an opportunity to sit down and get to know each other. We grabbed the empty conference room at Task Unit–Fallujah, and he and I shared our respective backgrounds with each other. Joe's grasp of Arabic and his extensive experience in the Middle East were impressive, and his ability to leverage his combat skills as well as his gregarious nature for influence with the Marines would be difficult for me to replace. I hoped to concentrate my energy on developing the Fallujah city council as well as the new mayor. I had performed similar actions in Afghanistan, so these opportunities were well within my experience level. Joe also shared his

assessment of the local political scene in Fallujah as well as his advice on how best to integrate into the operations of the Marines. In his view, the new city council was worth the time and effort of Coalition Forces and in the end would be the enduring local institution that would survive our presence. He felt that the tribal situation was maturing nicely, that the Albu Issa tribe was still consolidating its influence west of Fallujah, and that the next tribe to focus on was the Jumayli, north of the city. His particular scorn, however, as well as his greatest caution, was for the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council (FTSC). It was a shadowy organization that purported to speak for the area's tribal sheiks and attempted to exercise political influence in the city. The fact that the residents of Fallujah were not particularly tribal and that known tribal leaders from the Fallujah area were not involved in the FTSC were red flags for Joe in terms of both the FTSC's legitimacy and credibility. The "sheiks council" definitely needed to be watched. It was led by a "Sheik" Abu Bakr, who was in constant competition with the Fallujah city council for political influence, and the group had its own rival weekly meeting to discuss the people's business. Joe warned me that in his opinion the FTSC was a bunch of former Baathists looking to return to power, al-Qaeda members seeking contracts and influence to derail the Iraqi government's goals, and criminals seeking to make money and gain power. He also expressed his concern that some members of the previous Marine battalion's civil affairs team had regarded the members of the FTSC as the "Fathers of Fallujah," veritable Thomas Jeffersons and Alexander Hamiltons of the city, and that this perspective had to be vigorously confronted. He mentioned how he had already targeted several of the FTSC's members for raids by the SEAL Team and that everything had to be done to build up the city council and marginalize the so-called Fallujah sheiks. His assessment was straightforward and to the point. It was clear that the insurgency of Iraq was much more multifaceted than was the Taliban in Afghanistan, and I looked forward to attending the first meeting of the new Fallujah city council in a few days and to see the famous city for the first time.

NOTES

1. Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (3rd Quarter 2008): 62–66.

2. The Abu Mahal tribe in Al Qaim near the Syrian border turned against al-Qaeda in large part because al-Qaeda had burned down the tribe's warehouses of liquor, bootleg DVDs, and porn that they smuggled into Iraq and sold for profit.
3. Captain Patriquin was killed in Ramadi on December 6, 2006. You can view Patriquin's presentation at: http://abcnews.go.com/images/US/how_to_win_in_anbar_v4.pdf.
4. John Bagot Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948), p. 41.
5. Ibid., p. 176.
6. Ibid., p. 76.

|| Chapter 4 ||

“Are We Losing Fallujah?” (2007)

This is first a political war, second a psychological war, and third a military war.
Lt. Gen. Lewis Walt (USMC), on Vietnam, February 1967

It was late March 2007, and the sun had yet to rise over the Fallujah Government Center in the city’s heart, a lonely citadel of stability in a sea of insurgency. The squat, ten-acre compound of concrete barriers and blast walls, razor-sharp concertina wire, and sturdy outposts guarded the thin shard of government that attempted to provide Iraqis with a semblance of normalcy. It was a cold, late March morning, and the Marines and Iraqi soldiers on guard hunkered down in their outposts trying to ward off the early morning chill and share sea stories and cigarettes as they looked out over the still slumbering city. Some local residents had already risen to the calls of the muezzin summoning the faithful to morning prayers, but most seemed to have chosen warm beds and continued sleep over their religious obligations. Nothing was out of sorts to the Marines, the telltale signs of an impending attack absent to their bloodshot and bleary eyes. Those moments before dawn are always the hardest to get through when standing guard, which is why the enemy usually chooses to attack around this time. With a descending scream and a resounding crack, the first of at least a dozen mortar rounds impacted within the perimeter, slicing the air

with chunks of jagged metal as the staccato of machine-gun fire broke the morning's peace. Tracers burned through the air and impacted on several of the guard posts in an attempt to make everyone seek cover and not see what would happen next. It was a standard ploy from the insurgents, so as soon as it started, the Marines and Iraqis knew something else was coming.

At the compound's entrance, the Marines noticed an overburdened truck trying to speed its way through the serpentine traffic barriers. As it ignored commands from the Iraqi guards and continued to barrel through the serpentine, the Marines and Iraqis opened fire with a fusillade of machine-gun and rifle bullets that impacted the engine block and shattered the windshield. Midway through the traffic barriers the truck ground to a halt with bullets pinging off its metal body seeking the driver. After a brief pause, the vehicle exploded, decimating the nearby traffic barriers and sending a great plume of fire and smoke into the air. The shock wave echoed out in concentric circles, kicking up dust and debris as stray dogs ran for cover. The mayor's office and city council meeting hall were rocked as great fissures opened up in their walls and all their windows shattered and sent flying glass everywhere. As the crackle of gunfire continued, it became evident that the truck bomb was simply a diversion, as a second truck, this time laden with chlorine gas as well as explosives, charged through a thinly manned checkpoint on the opposite side of the compound. As the Iraqi police at the entrance there fled their post, Iraqi soldiers fired on the truck as it surged down the entryway toward the main barracks building occupied by the Iraqi soldiers and their Marine advisers. As it drew parallel with the barracks, it erupted into a fireball. As the shock waves of the explosion dissipated, bitter chlorine gas began to burn people's lungs and a giant crater created by the explosion filled with raw sewage after bursting the city's main sewer line. The explosion shattered the façade of the barracks building, but thankfully the building did not collapse. Amid the ensuing chaos, several insurgents with suicide vests rushed the compound trying to breach its perimeter, but they never made it as they were cut down by rifle and machine-gun fire from the Marines. As the debris from the two trucks smoldered and the fighting tapered off, quiet descended on Fallujah. The final tally of enemy killed stood at eleven, while Iraqi soldier and Marine casualties topped eighty-five. Miraculously, none were killed and most injuries were relatively minor compared to what could have happened.

This attack was essentially our “welcome back” to Fallujah as my battalion and I finished the process of returning to Fallujah and taking the place of the Marine battalion that had spent the past seven months in the city. As we prepared for deployment, we had watched events in the city closely. It was evident that the situation had deteriorated significantly from our previous time in the city from 2005 to 2006, but the true extent was not evident until we returned in March of 2007. We had spent the previous eight months preparing through a busy and strenuous training program in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Fort A. P. Hill, Virginia; and Twentynine Palms, California. In addition to the physical aspects of training, such as physical conditioning, weapons employment in an urban environment, and both foot and vehicle patrolling, we also spent time preparing for the mental aspects of the challenge. My experience as operations officer for Regimental Combat Team 8 in 2005 had underlined that however tactically savvy a Marine battalion might be, if its leaders failed to conceptualize the problem of counterinsurgency correctly and, more important, ensure that every unit member also understood the challenge, it did not matter how persistent its activities were and how hard its Marines worked. One had to confront this insurgency with a holistic approach. Largely for these reasons, the leaders of the battalion and I implemented an information program that presented a variety of themes and concepts to the Marines and sailors about counterinsurgency and its core elements. I also sought to foster an environment where they could ask questions and discuss what we had presented to them. In many respects, I realize this type of give and take might appear unusual for a military unit, but it was imperative that all our members discuss and debate aspects of the insurgency problem so they had a deeper understanding of how their work would contribute to the overall campaign. We felt that if we just took the time to explain things to all members of the unit, we would be more successful.

The themes that Sgt. Maj. Mike Lane and I presented came from our previous experiences in Iraq and centered on explaining the inherent frustrations that came with counterinsurgency operations, such as that one rarely sees the enemy and all the enemy’s actions are meant to cause an overreaction and thereby make more enemies among the people. There was also the frustration of knowing that the enemy was trying to hit us with suicide bombers, but we also had to be mindful of the local population who

were endangered by our own firing as we tried to protect ourselves from this ever-present threat. We inculcated a sense of teamwork and adherence to doing the right thing regardless of what the enemy was doing. The mantra my leaders and I constantly reinforced was that we were not telling them not to shoot; we were telling them to be discriminating shooters. They had the right and obligation to protect themselves and their fellow Marines and sailors, but they had to make split-second judgment calls about a perceived threat. We trained incessantly to make sure they could make the right call and therefore increase their comfort factor, as much as one can ever be comfortable with the situations they would face daily in a crowded city where the enemy blends into the population.

Another aspect we emphasized was that they had to be alert every second they were out among the population, because the enemy only needed a second to make its attack. This would be particularly difficult in the heat of the Iraqi summer that began in late April. We told them that if they became complacent, or rushed their patrols to escape the heat, they might never make it back. We also emphasized that they needed to come home with their honor clean so they could look at themselves in the mirror with no regrets for the rest of their lives. The enemy would do anything and everything to further its cause, no matter how despicable. We were not them and had to remain above revenge. We were Americans and represented the best nation on earth. These last themes were particularly important because many young Americans want things to be fair—if the enemy can do something, we ought to be able to do it also. Unfortunately, Americans rarely ever fight on an even basis. Limits are crucial in winning a counterinsurgency fight. Not adhering to limits would likely be more satisfying in terms of revenge, but it would also guarantee that we would lose the conflict. That is the basic nature of counterinsurgent war. I also think that morally correct behavior in combat results in less post-traumatic stress, because the combatants keep their honor clean. We faced a tough situation and saw terrible things, but we did not stoop to the enemy's level. In the end we could indeed look at ourselves in the mirror after we got home.

Needless to say, we conducted this training in the face of mounting "the war is lost" rhetoric that came at us every day on the cable news channels. How do you ask people to risk their lives when they hear members of

Congress openly denigrating the effort and calling for pulling out of Iraq regardless of the consequences or of the sacrifices to date? The last thing we told our battalion was to ignore the news and rhetoric. We were Marines and sailors; we had a tough job ahead of us, and we were going to do it well. As a reminder of just how tough it would be, in mid-February we found out that our sister battalion, 3rd Battalion 6th Marines, just west of Fallujah, lost its operations officer. He was out on patrol in an armored vehicle, and in a stroke of bad luck, a mortar round came in through the opening in the top of the vehicle where the gunner was standing. The round glanced off the gunner's arm and landed in the lap of the operations officer. Somehow, everyone else in the vehicle survived, but the operations officer never had a chance. He was a good man with a wife and several small children, and his loss was particularly poignant. The commander, Lt. Col. Jim McGrath, was a good friend of mine, and he took the loss hard, but he had to carry on as the battalion was only halfway through its deployment. I was on predeployment leave visiting my family in the Philadelphia area at the time. My family noticed that I had grown quiet and asked why, but how do you explain what happened when they know you will shortly be going to the same area? The best I could do was to dodge the question. I already knew they faced the toughest task. They had to go through every day of my deployment wondering if I was all right and hoping that a vehicle would not pull up outside their door one morning bearing a Marine officer and a chaplain to tell them that I would not be coming home. I had performed that solemn duty seven times in the past, so I knew exactly what that scene would entail. At least I knew what I was facing and was busy enough to keep myself fully occupied. My family did not have that luxury.

The first element from our battalion that deployed in early March was our advance party, which consisted of my operations and logistics officers, Capt. Brian Greene and Capt. Kenric Stevenson, as well as members from each company. They would lay the groundwork for the rest of the deployment and would also begin the process of turning Fallujah over to us. For me, the stress of having people I knew well and cared for deeply in harm's way started again when our advance party reached Fallujah. The lead Marines started going out on patrols to gain a sense of conditions in the city. Many experienced contact with the enemy again in short order. They started reporting back and painting a picture that was far darker than we had

previously known. Several officers from the battalion and I had made a predeployment site survey the previous December, and the situation was dangerous and unsettled, but it had worsened since then. Snipers were active once again in the city, and there were several insurgent IED cells functioning. The Fallujah Government Center received regular mortar attacks, and the city council was also under assault. Insurgents had assassinated several of its leading members. The Iraqi army brigade in the city had received its own battle space, and the battalion we would be relieving was staying out of it by only operating at Fallujah's northern and southern edges. They had also scaled back their patrolling effort and were mostly only going out at night to reduce their visibility so that Iraqi soldiers and police would be seen by the public as providing security. Unfortunately, the enemy seems to have interpreted this action as our withdrawal from the fight because they became a great deal more active. It had been a tough deployment for the battalion, as they had taken twenty-two killed and well over a hundred wounded, and they had clearly had enough. They wanted to get out of Fallujah without any more casualties. Lastly, the enemy had severely targeted the Iraqi police. Many refused to go home and slept in derelict buildings around the Government Center, the location of their headquarters. Those that did return home were often assassinated on their doorsteps in front of their families or had their houses blown up while they were at work. The situation was grim.

On the morning before our main body started to leave for Iraq, I gathered the entire battalion together one more time as a group. I could not do this in Iraq because big groups made lucrative targets. Moreover, once we got out there, we would be spread out all over Fallujah. I spoke about the themes we had stressed during training and reinforced that we were in it together. As I spoke to them, I looked out over a sea of about nine hundred faces, many just out of high school. They were fresh-faced, and though they were tentative about heading to Iraq, there was some excitement as well. This was why they had joined the Marine Corps or Navy (our medical corpsmen). Reflecting on the difficulties the unit we were relieving had been through during its deployment, I found myself wondering how many would not come home. It was a sobering thought, but not a thought one can dwell on. In an environment like Fallujah, the more you tried to protect your forces, the more the enemy felt emboldened to attack. Our mission

was not merely to survive and return home; it was to reverse the violence and return Fallujah to a semblance of peace. It had to be done quickly, because I knew the American public was running out of patience. To achieve our mission, we would have to push these young men into harm's way, and we would lose some in the process. That is probably the hardest part about command: the moral courage to do what is necessary to achieve the mission but also to attempt to find the balance that enables you to have as few casualties as possible. When you spend the better part of eight months training together and watching your unit mature and progress as Marines and sailors, it is hard to think that some will not come home. I had been in contact with the parents of many who wanted nothing more than to have their sons come home, but I knew I could not make any promises. This included my own family. I remembered my brother-in-law asking me about how much I would be exposed to combat. He had watched Vietnam movies and assumed I would be in a helicopter overhead coordinating things. I told him that was not what Marines do. I had to be out with my Marines every day, sharing the heat and the danger, because that is the way we lead—from the front. You cannot make appropriate decisions in combat without understanding what your subordinates are going through and what condition they are in. The only way to understand these things is by being on the ground with them.

We departed Camp Lejeune in late March 2007. As with all such deployments, the parting was bittersweet. It hurts to leave the family, but most of us were eager to go and get on with the job at hand. I had a particularly poignant moment as we were staging our gear. My sixteen-year-old son was walking with me as I moved among the battalion members and their families. At one point he said, "Dad, these guys are all my age." That hit me hard because I had been trying to avoid thinking about that fact. I was watching several groups of parents hug their sons and watch them board the bus. I could not imagine doing the same with my son. Once again, I knew I had the easier task over the next seven months. Still, we were well prepared, and I knew that we could make a difference.

We arrived at our base, Camp Baharia, late on April 1 and settled in. After some initial training to help adjust to new developments in enemy tactics since our previous combat tour, the outgoing battalion commander and I went into the city to look at the damage from the attack on the Government Center that had taken place several days before. No one had started cleaning up the site or rebuilding anything. The Iraqis were waiting for us to do it for them or contract out to have someone else do it. We toured other areas of the city, and several Marine positions looked run-down and in need of serious repair. A big part of the settling-in routine included meetings with our regimental commander, Col. Rich Simcock, and his boss, Brig. Gen. Mark Gurganus. Because I was returning to a city where I had spent a great deal of time on my previous tour, they asked me about my impressions of how things were going. Many at the regiment level and above believed we were in the process of losing Fallujah again. While that was a sobering thought, I tried to be less pessimistic. We certainly had our work cut out for us. The turnover process lasted approximately two weeks. We assumed responsibility for Fallujah on April 12, 2007. We helped our predecessors leave and return home without further casualties and then started to take a detailed look at what we had inherited. To a degree, we had been lucky in that the city was very quiet during the turnover. This situation did not last.

Our original plan called for our staying in the same routines that our predecessors had maintained so we could understand what they had been doing and why they had been doing it. They had learned through experience, and we needed to take advantage of what they had absorbed. One of their first experiences, which took place the week after they had taken over Fallujah the previous October, was having an entire up-armored Humvee destroyed with all five Marine occupants killed or wounded by an enormous IED buried under the road. We knew there were more such IEDs, some of them under unbroken asphalt, throughout the city, and we needed to find and remove them to prevent a repeat of that occurrence. It certainly made driving around the city an uncomfortable activity.

One of the first things we recognized was the need to spend time enhancing the protection at each security position we occupied. Suicide-vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) were fairly common, as were mortar and sniper attacks. There had also been instances

of individuals wearing suicide vests and attacking our positions on foot. Some security positions were not well-protected, while others had deteriorated over time. The desert is a harsh environment, and anything besides concrete disintegrates in the sun, wind, and sand, all of which are frequent if not daily occurrences. We immediately began replacing Hesco barriers and sand bags. Bulletproof windows were installed on observation bunkers we had rebuilt. Some fighting positions were badly situated and had to be torn down and rebuilt elsewhere to maximize the protective advantage. These were all immediate tasks, as we knew there would be no "honeymoon period" in Fallujah. We knew that the insurgents were always watching us closely and would rapidly exploit any sign of weakness or vulnerability. We had to be alert and focused at all times because only a small window of opportunity would allow the enemy to make a successful attack.

As for the routine, it did not take two weeks to figure out that patrolling only at night and not in Iraqi-owned areas was not working. We had no idea what was going on in those areas and had the impression they had become safe havens for the enemy. Iraqi soldiers were not actively pursuing the enemy, so the enemy had room to maneuver. As we pushed out from our combat outposts and forward operating bases, regardless of the time of day or night, we made initial contact with the enemy, who clearly resented the intrusions into their space. Firefights, especially in the southern part of the city, began to occur almost daily and sometimes multiple times a day. The enemy realized there was a new unit in town and sought to intimidate us. One other aspect that we covered in our predeployment training had been that, much like that first hit in a football game, our reaction would set the tone for both us and the enemy. If we reacted strongly and hit them hard and pursued them, they would know they were in for a long seven months. Our battalion call sign was "Spartan," and like the Spartans of old, we were going to take the enemy head-on and make them regret operating in Fallujah. We also fully intended to change the impression of too many on our side who thought that Fallujah was in the process of being lost again.

As we clashed with the enemy early on, we took casualties and inflicted them as well, but none of our Marines or sailors died. We had several close calls, but we felt almost as if we were living a charmed existence. Some of the stories were almost humorous. After one extended firefight, I was

speaking with one of our wounded Marines who had been hit by several bullets. None of them had hit vital areas, but one had hit his magazine pouch, which caused it to explode, giving him a number of additional shrapnel injuries. Again, nothing had struck a vital area. He was fully conscious as he was being treated and was thoroughly angered. It turns out the enemy fire had knocked him down and blown off his trigger finger. He could see the enemy that had shot him, but he could not return fire because his hand was a mess, as was his weapon. He settled for returning fire with a stream of obscenities instead as his buddies provided covering fire and dragged him to a covered position to get him treated and evacuated. We heard later that he had tried to leave the hospital and return to his company but was too badly injured. That was actually a fairly common theme. Whenever Marines or sailors were injured but not seriously enough for evacuation back to the United States, they always wanted to return to their buddies. They knew that their friends were still in harm's way, and the bonds formed in combat units are usually closer than those even in an immediate family.

As we attempted to figure out what was going on in Fallujah, we came to the realization that the "secure" perimeter of Fallujah was not secure at all. We found a number of "rat lines" the enemy was using, either on foot or by vehicle, to access the city without using the entry control points we controlled. Much of the information we received was coming from the Iraqi police, and we were not sure we could trust them. Many in our battalion who had been on the previous deployment were convinced that the Iraqi police were collaborating with the insurgents and in some cases actually placing IEDs themselves. We never found hard evidence of this, but getting over our suspicions and coming to trust the police was difficult, to say the least. As reports came in of insurgents infiltrating in and out of the city, we began a number of vehicle and foot patrols around the city's perimeter, many times accompanied by Iraqi police officers, looking for ways to seal the city off again. If the enemy could keep their supply lines open and get fighters and ammunition into or out of the city at will, we were in for a long, dismal fight. We eventually implemented plans to seal off rat lines and redesign all the ECPs to stop the leakage into and out of the city.

The ECPs themselves were in a state of disrepair. I had been involved in their original construction in 2005, and aside from some patchwork repairs

here and there, nothing much had been done since. Thousands of people and vehicles had flowed through them on a daily basis, and a dedicated commercial truck ECP (1A) was so frequently backed up that drivers would spend days in line trying to enter the city. This was a serious sore point with the population as the price of goods went up or perishable items spoiled in the heat. We also found that Iraqi soldiers working at the ECPs frequently mistreated the Fallujans and took any advantage of their position to demand bribes or to make life difficult. The majority of Iraqi soldiers were Shia from Baghdad or southeastern Iraq, and there was no love lost between them and Fallujah's Sunni population. The ECPs were clearly a point of friction that needed attention.

Our charmed existence came to a crashing end on April 23, 2007. We had had several firefights in the morning in the southern part of the city and had taken several casualties. The company commander for that area, Capt. Jeff McCormack, was an aggressive, tactically savvy, and experienced officer. He had been the first to push his company out and engage the enemy. Not surprisingly, they had seen the majority of the fighting to date. He had been supporting the Iraqi army with a cordon in the city's industrial area while the Iraqi soldiers conducted search operations. He had provided a combat engineer team to assist them with any unexploded ordnance they discovered. He had already had two attacks, a rocket-propelled grenade attack and a small arms engagement, that resulted in the wounding of one Marine. His unit had just come off a cordon on an IED when Iraqi soldiers he was supporting told him they had just received intelligence regarding the location of an IED-making cell. They asked him to provide a cordon of the objective while they searched the location. It was late afternoon when he called me on the radio asking for permission to support the Iraqis in a different zone to the west of the industrial area. He wanted to support them since he had worked with them all day and did not want to turn the mission over to another unit. I was hesitant to let him do so since they had had a long day already and he would be going into a zone that reportedly had a number of buried IEDs. Nonetheless, he was with the Iraqi army unit already, and they were pushing hard to search the target location. I agreed.

About a half-hour later, he called me to say the Iraqi army unit had not found anything. He had stopped and was being careful; his Marines had been moving slowly and looking for signs of enemy activity. As he was

speaking, the fourth vehicle in his patrol, an armored Humvee, was blown into the air and flipped on its roof. The gunner's turret flew off, with the gunner still in it, and landed twenty feet away from the vehicle, pinning the gunner underneath. McCormack immediately got off the radio and began to get a handle on the situation. The first priority was to look for secondary IEDs, then establish security because the enemy frequently took advantage of the chaos caused by an IED attack to pile on with grenades, rifles, and machine guns. They did not do so in this case. As McCormack and his Marines and sailors got the casualties treated and evacuated, they reported that one Marine had been killed. The gunner had been wounded badly, but the doctors who treated him before evacuating him to Baghdad and then Germany deemed him to have a decent chance of surviving. One of the other occupants had a serious but not life-threatening head injury. Strangely, the driver of the vehicle remained untouched, physically at least. Mentally, he was having a difficult time dealing with what had happened, and he blamed himself. We later determined that he had parked right over the IED but had no way of knowing because the asphalt was unmarked. There is no telling how long it had been buried there. McCormack reported seeing a red-haired Iraqi acting strangely, then ducking into a gated compound immediately before the IED exploded, but when his Marines went looking for him, he was nowhere to be found. After the attack, McCormack and his remaining men went to the Iraqi army compound, and the Iraqi battalion's executive officer thanked them for their sacrifice and asked them to continue to support his soldiers. The relationship between this Iraqi battalion and Captain McCormack's company developed into one of the strongest in the battalion.

That evening was a tough one at our combat operations center. We had taken our first killed in action (KIA), and everyone was in a somber mood. The vehicle that had been hit was from our attached engineer platoon, and all the Marines in it were combat engineers. These were some of the most valuable Marines in our battalion because of their skills and equipment. We had lost one and had two seriously wounded. Their platoon commander was upset but quickly realized they had a job to do, and he needed to ensure that the platoon remained focused and ready to go back into the city the next day. They were reinforcing much of the blast protection and bulletproof

barriers at our positions throughout the city, so other Marine lives quite literally depended on their returning out there and remaining focused.

Grieving in combat is always difficult. The dead are quickly evacuated and returned to their families in the United States. Marines and sailors have only a fleeting chance to say goodbye before that happens, and if they are out on patrol or working, they miss that chance. It is for this reason that every Marine unit in Iraq held a memorial service within a couple of days of losing a member of their unit. These services offered a chance to talk about the Marine or sailor and to take a moment to remember and say goodbye to the boots, inverted rifle with a helmet on top, and dog tags suspended from the handgrip that represented the individual. The service for LCpl. Dale Peterson was made doubly poignant because shortly before it began, we learned that the gunner from the vehicle had succumbed to his wounds back in the United States. We have the best medical system in the world, and it has saved more lives than one can count, but there are times when the damage is so bad that the best the medical field has to offer cannot save the wounded. We held a memorial service for LCpl. Jon Kirk a couple of days later.

Two days after we had our first Marine KIA, we had another attack that resulted in serious casualties. One of our observation posts overlooking the main route through Fallujah was named Observation Post (OP) Adams after a Marine who had died during the battalion's previous deployment in Fallujah. Once a position is so named, especially if it is named after someone who has been killed, the name rarely changes. This OP had frequently been the target of sniper fire and other small arms attacks, and its Marines felt particularly vulnerable. This feeling was reinforced on April 25 when we had a patrol stop in front of the OP to drop off supplies for those manning it. It was nearly dusk, and several Marines from the patrol had dismounted from their armored Humvee, while several others had come out from the OP itself. All were wary of a possible attack and had established security for the linkup. As the supplies were being handed off, a rocket-propelled grenade was fired from across the street and hit a wall near several of the Marines. One gunnery sergeant from the patrol and a corporal from the OP received wounds. The gunnery sergeant was in bad shape, and only the quick thinking and thorough competency of the corpsman who treated him on the spot saved his life. The RPG had blown off one of his

hands, and he had multiple shrapnel wounds over much of his body. The corporal had many shrapnel wounds also, but was conscious and cracking jokes as he was treated and evacuated. The initial reports over the radio were bad; they indicated that the OP was on fire and several Marines were down. We arrived on scene moments later, and it turned out that a palm tree by the wall the RPG had struck had caught fire and set the awning over the garage of the house next door on fire as well. Both fires went out quickly and did little damage. The wounded had already been evacuated, so we went in to the observation post to see how the Marines were doing. They were shaken up because the corporal had been their squad leader, and they held him in high regard. We spent time talking with them and assured them that their squad leader would be all right. For many, this was their first deployment and also their first serious enemy contact. Several were concerned about their vulnerability in the observation post because there was little distance between them and several nearby and taller buildings the insurgents could use for an attack. They were indeed vulnerable, but their duty was to ensure that the insurgents could not place IEDs on the main route through Fallujah that they could observe from the OP. We already had proof that it was having the desired effect. After we returned to our base camp, though, we started trying to figure out ways to eliminate the observation post without losing the benefits it provided.

As we were dealing with the fighting in Fallujah, we also kept our eye on developments in the nearby town of Karmah, northeast of Fallujah. The situation had deteriorated there as well since our last deployment, and things had gotten so bad that the regiment asked us to provide a platoon of Marines to operate with the police in the town. The Army unit that had responsibility for the area was so hard-pressed they could not afford to patrol with the police. I went there to take a closer look at what was occurring in the town, and I was dismayed. I had spent a good bit of time there on my previous deployment, but the town had taken significant battle damage in the interim, while the Army unit in the town was almost completely buttoned up and on the defensive. The police station was in a state of disarray, and morale among the police was low. The Army unit’s morale was not much better, largely because the soldiers had just found out they would now be doing a fifteen-month deployment instead of twelve. As for the police, few showed up for work, and when they did, they would not

go out on patrol alone. I could not blame them. Since the Army was unable to patrol with them, they just sat in the police station.

We quickly got a platoon into the police station in Karmah with a sniper team attached to them to start hitting back hard. The platoon commander, Lt. Jon Joseph, was a prior enlisted officer who was exactly the man for the job. He was aggressive without being foolhardy and was highly competent. He and his platoon injected some backbone into the police and started patrolling with them the day after they got to the police station. Their presence also boosted morale in the Army unit, which was an added bonus. As in Fallujah, changing tactics and showing more aggressiveness caused an immediate enemy reaction, but this enemy was not as tough as in Fallujah. When they were hit hard, especially by the sniper team, things quieted down considerably. One of the weapons the sniper team used was a .50-caliber sniper rifle. During one firefight, the sniper team observed several insurgents sprinting to get into a courtyard with a large metal door at its entrance. The team engaged them with the .50-caliber just as the insurgents were trying to close the door. The round hit on the door and blew it off its hinges and into the courtyard. When our Marines went in to look for the enemy, the courtyard was in shambles, and though they found no one, there were several indications they had hit and wounded someone badly. Needless to say, between the motivation of Joseph and his platoon and the operations of the sniper team, the Iraqi police in Karmah felt considerably better about working with U.S. forces.

Fallujah's northern section remained fairly quiet. The company commander there, Capt. Mason Harlow, was also smart and experienced. He had been the battalion's intelligence officer on the previous deployment and knew the city inside and out. He also spent time and effort talking to the Iraqi units in his area to get as much information from them as possible. The result was that when he moved on a target, he usually was operating on solid intelligence. The result was normally a quiet capture, because the enemy realized it was better to surrender when surrounded and take their chances with the Iraqi legal system rather than fight it out. Harlow and his Marines did get into a few firefights and experienced some sniper activity, but for the most part, especially when compared with the city's southern areas, his was pretty quiet. More than a little of the reason was the relentless

pressure Harlow and his company, along with the Iraqis, put on the enemy every day.

Each of the Iraqi battalions operating in Fallujah had a military transition team (MiTT) working with them. When we deployed to Fallujah, we were hit with the requirement to augment each team with eight to ten Marines. These people needed to be a mixture of leaders and junior Marines, and it hurt losing them to the MiTTs, but we had to improve the Iraqi army. The only way to do that was by working closely with them. Each of these MiTTs was a pickup team consisting of Marines and sailors from several different units, and they had a tough mission. They lived with the Iraqi unit they were working with and had to find ways to improve their activity and professionalism. They also had to overcome thirty-plus years of horrendous habits Iraqi officers had picked up under Saddam. As we pushed them to do more, they also came in more contact with the enemy.

On April 29, an Iraqi army platoon with its accompanying MiTT was patrolling in the Al-Andalus district, one of the worst in Fallujah, located toward Fallujah's center, with a history of sniper and ambush activity. The insurgents would spring an ambush, and as the firefight went on, an enemy sniper would steadily pick off Marines and sailors under the cover of the firing. On this particular morning, as the patrol moved into the district, they knew something was wrong. The streets were empty. As they increased their wariness, a young boy came up to their interpreter and told him he knew where a weapons cache was. He pointed out a house, and Iraqi soldiers entered it, along with some Marines. They quickly realized they had been set up, as the house was empty and access to the roof (for better observation and security) was blocked off with cinderblocks. As they came out of the house, all hell broke loose. It was exactly the type of ambush about which we had been warned. A Marine from our battalion went down with a bullet in his abdomen, and Lt. Travis Manion, originally from 1st Recon Battalion, went to his assistance, as did a corpsman. The sniper hit both of them, with the corpsman being seriously wounded and Manion killed. We knew it was a sniper because he was hitting them just outside the edges of their body armor. All of this happened within approximately twenty seconds. One of our mobile combat patrols reacted and came to the assistance of the Iraqi platoon and their MiTT to help extricate them from the fight and evacuate the casualties. The lieutenant in charge described it as

being like a scene from *Black Hawk Down*. The enemy personnel were on both rooftops as well as at street level, firing and throwing grenades as our Marines returned fire and grenades. The combat patrol packed a heavier punch than the Iraqis and the MiTT because of the machine guns they had mounted on their vehicles. Thus, when they weighed in, the insurgents decided that they had had enough and withdrew at the same time our forces did. It was a violent and chaotic affair, and it is a wonder we did not lose more Marines, though we lost no Iraqi soldiers. We went back in there later to see if we could restart the fight with better odds, but the enemy was long gone. Both the Marine from our battalion and the corpsman survived their wounds. The memorial service for Lieutenant Manion was held several days later. He had been another competent and experienced officer who his fellow Marines referred to as the "Man Onion." His father was a colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve. I had met Manion several times as I moved about the city, and he had been an impressive young man. At his memorial service, I learned that he was in Captain McCormack's vehicle when Lance Corporals Kirk and Peterson were killed. Manion had blamed himself for their deaths because he had told McCormack which road to take.

The next day we supported another cordon-and-sweep operation that the Iraqi army wanted to conduct. They had received a tip about a location in the industrial area of the city that was being used to make IEDs and store weapons and ammunition. We started early in the morning hoping to catch the enemy still in the building, but we had no luck. The sweep was successful, though, as we discovered the building and its enormous weapons cache. There was IED-making material, such as initiating devices, spools of wire, containers to put the explosives in, and plenty of explosives. There were also RPGs and mortar rounds as well as tubes and tons of other types of ammunition. We were happy to see all of it destroyed because it was within easy walking distance of the point where the RPG had been launched that had hit OP Adams the week before. Iraqi engineers dropped the building on top of the cache by explosives, which ignited a fire. We were not exactly sure of the types of munitions in the cache, but as it burned the smoke coming out of it was a mixture of many different colors, so we knew there were chemicals in it besides weapons and ammunition. The Iraqis were delighted by the success they had achieved, but they were particularly pleased with the support they had received from us. They felt

virtually untouchable with Marines backing them up, and they acted that way. A member of the MiTT told me later that if we had not been there with them, they would have quickly set up, conducted a perfunctory search, and then returned to their base so that they would not get into a fight. Our presence with them had given them confidence to take the time to be thorough. It was good to work with them on these types of operations not only because of the effect we had on their behavior, but also because it got us into their areas to look around and see what was happening in neighborhoods for which we were not actually responsible. That the enemy was able to establish such a large cache of weapons and ammunition, and had apparently been working from that location for quite some time, lent credence to our theory that the Iraqi army had not curtailed their operations much.

It is odd how things happen in combat. We had taken two members of the battalion killed and a number evacuated with serious wounds up to this point, but there were also lighter moments. One occurred as we were on a patrol south of the city. We had received information the enemy was using the area as a staging point to rest and to build IEDs. Captain McCormack sent a platoon down to work the area for several days. His way of doing this was to go down and pick out a house that offered standoff protection from attack. They would talk to the male head of the household and offer to pay him rent for the couple of days they would be using the house. The Iraqis rarely refused as it was a good way to make money for the inconvenience of having Marines live in their house. In many cases, the family would make friends with the Marines, and they would all sit down to meals together. The corpsmen would treat minor ailments among the family members, and the more handy Marines would try to fix any problems in the home. We came down to visit the platoon and see how they were doing. McCormack joined us, and the lead vehicle in his patrol was one of our massive seven-ton trucks with a large mine roller attached to its front to set off pressure-sensitive IEDs. They are hard to maneuver, though, especially on the tight dirt roads among the farm fields and canals in that area. At one point, we

ran into a dead end and needed to turn around, which promptly got the mine roller stuck. We dismounted and set security, then tried to figure out how to get the roller unstuck. As I was watching this, I heard several Marines behind me start laughing. I turned around to discover that my own vehicle had gotten its right rear tire over the edge of the road with the left front tire well up in the air. The vehicle was balanced precariously, with the driver, Cpl. Alfred Gigante, a stoical Marine, peering out his window waiting for someone to help. With his combat eyeglasses on, he looked like the old cartoon character Mr. Magoo. Everyone got a good laugh, some of it from relief that the vehicle had not flipped over. We used the seven-ton truck to pull the Humvee back onto the road and all was well. Eventually, we had to leave the mine roller in place for the day, and McCormack led a patrol the next day to recover it. The insurgents had tried to burn it without much luck. En route to the stranded piece of equipment, the patrol had hit an IED with yet another mine roller, and McCormack described it as being pretty spectacular when several of its wheels went flying through the air. It worked as intended, though, and no one was hurt.

As April turned to May, we continued to maintain contact with the enemy and support both the Iraqi police and army. They each wanted to conduct raids or cordon-and-sweeps with our support. The army was easier to work with because they usually stuck to their plans, but their intelligence about the enemy was not as good as that of the police. The police were different, though, in their approach to making raids. I think their chief, Colonel Faisal Ismael Hussein al-Zobai, suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He would make plans quickly and then change them repeatedly. He certainly was one of the more interesting and colorful characters we dealt with on a regular basis. Faisal was a proud Iraqi patriot who had previously served in Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard as a Special Forces colonel. He was a stout man and had a predilection for wearing wraparound sunglasses, much like the terminator in Arnold Schwarzenegger’s movies. He was no fan of the American presence in his country, but by 2007 his animosity had shifted to al-Qaeda. He had played a

prominent role in the Arab Sunni insurgent group, the 1920 Revolution Brigade, and likely had American blood on his hands. As we worked with him, we never brought this up, but we knew he had a brother still involved with the insurgent organization in the Zaidan area southeast of Fallujah. We did not dig into this sensitive area because it was obvious to us that as police chief, he was firmly focused on eliminating al-Qaeda from Fallujah, while he brought needed stability to a police department that had at various times colluded with or been butchered by al-Qaeda. Local residents desperately wanted security in their neighborhoods, and Chief Faisal seemed determined to provide it; all he needed was U.S. support.

The difficulty in providing support to the police was that they would frequently make detailed plans and brief them to the group, but when they went to implement them they rarely did what they had planned to do. They were also still afraid of going out into town and did so only in large groups. Unfortunately, firing their weapons gave them confidence, so they would fire all over the place, and we usually had to be careful when they were out and about. We spent much time and effort trying to get them to stop this practice, with little success. It was difficult to get them to understand that what goes up will always come down. They all believed in one of Murphy's rules of combat: "when in doubt, empty the magazine." The Iraqi army had the same issue to a degree, and when they hit an IED, they would all start firing in reaction. We called it the death blossom. It made them more than a little difficult to work with. The hard part about all this was that every time we went out with them, they wanted us to form a cordon and stay in place, vulnerable to sniper fire, while they swept through an area looking for insurgents or weapons. On one of these operations, one of our vehicle gunners was hit in the shoulder by a sniper. He was treated and quickly evacuated, but it reinforced our desire to keep moving and not remain stationary anywhere for long.

Another area where we took a different approach from the previous Marine unit was in the detention of suspected insurgents. They had had a tendency to grab any adult Iraqi male in the vicinity of an incident in the hopes that they would net the insurgent at the same time. This resulted in a lot of detainees, most of whom were released in about two weeks. This bred considerable resentment among those detained, many without good reason. On the other hand, we emphasized tactical patience with regard to detaining

anyone. We tried to ensure that we actually had evidence on someone detained. This resulted in fewer detentions, but we had stronger cases against the ones we detained, and thus a higher percentage of them were sent to longer-term detention centers and were kept off the streets. The only exception to this approach was when we applied “sniper rules,” which I will explain later. We also sought to get some Fallujans released from detention at the request of family members. If someone we knew and respected could vouch for the detainee and assure us he would not cause more problems, we did whatever we could to get that person released. This gained some goodwill for us in short order. Getting people released was a time-consuming and tedious process, but it was worth it every time we did it.

On May 9, we lost another Marine. It had been a long day with false reports of a suicide bomber targeting one of the entry control points along with another sweep in the Al-Andalus district to root out sniper activity. The suicide bomber did not materialize and the sweep resulted in no contact. As this was going on, Captain McCormack’s company got into a heavy firefight in their area. It was a fast-moving, violent encounter, and our Marines did what they were trained to do. They got a few Marines up on rooftops to get a better view and to provide some overwatch security to their comrades on the streets. The rooftops in Fallujah had walls around them that came up to chest height. The Iraqis used their rooftops to sleep on during hot nights to find relief from the heat, so the walls provide some privacy. As LCpl. Walter O’Haire was peering over the edge of one of these walls, an insurgent sniper shot him in the back of the head, just below the edge of his helmet. He never knew what hit him and died instantly. We immediately set a cordon around the area and went sweeping from house to house in an attempt to find the sniper. Once again, we had no luck. There is a feeling of extreme vulnerability in an area when a sniper has just killed someone. You do not know where the enemy is, and they can hit you at any time. Everyone was on edge because the gunners in each vehicle were exposed constantly, as were the dismounted Marines trying to sweep the area. After a while, we called off the search and returned to base. McCormack spent the evening talking to Lance Corporal O’Haire’s squad to ensure they knew it was not their fault. They were doing exactly what they were supposed to do. He also wanted to make sure they would not go out the next day looking for revenge. O’Haire was gone, and lashing out

would only make things worse. It was another tough night. Lance Corporal O'Haire was from South Boston and one of seven children. He had lost his father a couple of years before, and his father's dying wish had been that his son make a good man of himself. He fulfilled that wish in spades.

Several days later, we had a big break. We had received a tip that there was a truck bomb factory in the southern part of the city. McCormack had the police come down to his forward operating base early in the morning to plan the raid on the factory. It was breaking so fast that he just took over and told them what to do instead of trying to formulate a plan with them. It worked. They conducted the raid, and while they again failed to catch anyone since the insurgents had run immediately before we had arrived, the Marines and police did find a tractor-trailer dump truck in the final stages of being made into a massive suicide truck bomb. The enemy had manufactured homemade explosives with fertilizer and diesel fuel (much like Timothy McVeigh with the Oklahoma City bomb in 1995), then packed it into fifty-five-gallon drums. They had then welded funnel-shaped cones onto each barrel to help vector the blast. The entire bed of the trailer was filled with these drums lying on their sides and stacked to the rim, all facing the same direction. Their idea was that the suicide driver would pull up next to one of our buildings and then detonate the bomb. The vectored blast would take out the bottom floor of the building, causing the entire structure to collapse. It was quite a relief to know that we had stopped this particular attack, but it led us to wonder how many more were out in the city.

McCormack's company had been sitting on a cordon around the building for several hours as the explosive ordnance disposal teams processed all the explosives. His Marines were not in the best defensive positions, and the enemy had started to snoop around and shoot at them. McCormack, working with our air officer on site, decided to request a bomb be dropped on the building in order to destroy it along with the dump truck bomb. It was at this point that I decided I needed to get out to the site to observe the geography firsthand. The good thing about arriving with an up-armored Humvee and heavy weapons was that the enemy decided to stop taking pot shots at McCormack's positions, and he was thus able to switch out his Marines and get fresh Marines on site while my vehicles held the cordon. After seeing the site and talking with our explosive ordnance Marines who inspected the truck and determined it was safe to tow, we

decided to have it towed out into the desert, where it was safely detonated. It probably would have been a safer call to have dropped a bomb, but I really felt that unless we absolutely had to do it, we needed to avoid taking such a measure. We were trying to improve security in the city, and dropping a bomb within the city limits at this point would have represented a step in the wrong direction, not to mention how much damage the dropped bomb and suicide truck bomb combined would have done to the surrounding area. I was told later the Marines had a good laugh at seeing the truck bomb towed out of the city as the Fallujans stared at it incongruously. Once again, I'm sure some of it was due to the relief from not having it used to attack us. The explosion was enormous when the truck was safely detonated out in the desert.

As we were following the truck being towed out of the city, we received word that another suicide truck bomb had attacked one of our observations posts, OP Fenton, located on the main route (Highway 10) through Fallujah. A pickup truck had sped past the OP firing a machine gun from the bed of the truck to get everyone's head down, then a larger truck, though not as large as the one we had just captured, had tried to ram its way through the vehicle blocking the entrance to the observation post. Our Marines opened fire as it approached the entrance, and the combination of that fire and the vehicle blocking the entryway stopped the truck in its tracks. It detonated and caused a great deal of superficial damage. The first to arrive on the scene was my weapons company commander, Capt. Chuck Hawthorne. He reported that the blast protection had worked and that while everyone was shaken up, no one had been injured. That was quite a relief. We arrived shortly after he did and had to pass through the debris and body parts left over from the suicide bomber and his vehicle. The front of OP Fenton was a mess, but we had repair kits ready to go. Within a couple of hours, there was no evidence that the attack had happened. We liked to think that this had to be demoralizing for the enemy. They put a great deal of effort as well as the life of one of their own into an attack, and it had had little to no effect on us. As far as the truck bomb was concerned, we came to the conclusion that since we had captured the big one, the insurgents must have decided to use the smaller one before we captured it also. The attack had been hasty and not well thought out. Between the blast protection built into the OP and the rushed nature of the attack, it produced few tangible results.

Sniper activity continued in the city. Each of our observation posts had a great deal done to them to minimize the exposure of the Marines assigned while still allowing them to see out. Camouflage netting broke up the outlines of our Marines, and each post had at least one pane of bulletproof glass taken from our armored Humvees. Some had a double layer. Two days after the truck bomb attack on OP Fenton, sniper fire hit another observation post further west on the main route through Fallujah. The sniper used an armor-piercing bullet that punched through two layers of bulletproof glass and nicked the top edge of the ballistic chest plate of the Marine standing watch. The bullet then entered his chest, but had so little velocity left that the Marine was not even sure he had been wounded. He had what looked to be a small cut in his chest, but to be safe we had him evacuated to the medical facility. X-rays showed that the bullet had indeed entered his chest and lodged near his spine, but had hit nothing vital. When I spoke with him, he said he felt fine and did not understand what all the fuss was about until the doctors showed him the x-ray. He wanted to return to his platoon, but with the bullet so close to his spine, he instead returned to the United States. He was one lucky young man.

Our own snipers were very active throughout this period. We used them for several different types of operations. The Fallujah Government Center still received mortar rounds on almost a weekly basis, so we assigned one team to try and find and kill the mortar team conducting the attacks. They were also used near IED hot spots to try and target those placing IEDs. Lastly, we used them in the counter sniper mode. They would investigate the site of each attack and try to think about how they would have conducted the attack if they were the insurgents. They would then target the areas where they thought a sniper might shoot from, but, much like the previous deployment, we had no luck. Our best luck came in aggressively working intelligence leads to catch or kill the person identified. We would never catch them in the act or with a weapon, but we would often detain them and challenge their release from the detention facility on the grounds they were a serious security risk. I have no doubt that some innocent Iraqis were caught up in this technique, but we called it “sniper rules.” If the person detained was involved with any sort of report or indication of sniper activity, we felt we had to keep the individual off the streets for as long as possible.

Another major initiative we conducted was the refurbishment of all the entry control points into Fallujah. Capt. Chuck Hawthorne was in charge of cleaning up each one and replacing all damaged or weather-deteriorated sand bags with fresh ones. Deteriorated Hesco barriers were replaced, but this process was much more time-consuming. He also redesigned ECP 1A (for commercial trucks) to achieve a better flow of traffic and increased the Marine presence on that ECP to ensure that proper searches were conducted in a timely manner and that Iraqi soldiers did not have an opportunity to conduct their normal shenanigans. As we moved about the area, we would stop in at the ECPs and ask Iraqis, especially truck drivers, how long they had spent in line. Atmospherics in the city improved as prices dropped due to products getting into the city in a timelier manner. None of this was glamorous work for Hawthorne and his Marines, but all of it sought to alleviate irritations in the life of the average Fallujan, and it seemed to have a positive effect. One of the gauges of this effect was that the number and types of complaints we received at the weekly city council meetings were changing. The number of complaints about time spent waiting in line at the ECPs went down, and the types of complaints changed to things other than those involving the entry control points. Much like the average American, the average Iraqi would always find something to complain about, but things were starting to look up and the stage was definitely set for a decisive change in Fallujah's fortunes.

As I thought about what we had accomplished since arriving in Fallujah, I had a sense we were making progress. Conditions were gradually improving and the security net around the city had been tightened considerably. That was all well and good, but we were still only just breaking even with regard to our impact on the insurgency itself. I felt we were nibbling at the edges and could go on doing so for our entire deployment with little effect on the final outcome. It was evident to both me and the leaders of our battalion that we needed to do something different, and it needed to be a radical change from all approaches used to date. The patience of the Iraqis in putting up with American forces in their city, as well as the patience of the American public in supporting what we were doing, was wearing thin. Whatever we were going to do, we needed to do it now.

|| Chapter 5 ||

Bringing Democracy to Iraq

[T]he most dangerous moment for a bad government is that in which it begins to reform.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Regime et la Revolution*

After I passed my interview with my predecessor Joe and decided to continue his practice of closely embedding with the Marines, we set out on April 10 for the first official meeting of the Fallujah city council (FCC) since it had been reconstituted the previous month. My goal was to work as closely as I could with the new mayor, after determining whether he was focused on helping the people of Fallujah, and to look for opportunities to use my knowledge of government and insurgency to help him do his job as well as build the city council into a viable local institution. Instead of meeting at the Fallujah Government Center in the center of town, we met at the Fallujah Development Center, which was about a mile and a half east of the city along the main highway leading into it. The center was manned by the Marines and was a clearinghouse of sorts for local Iraqis seeking compensation for damaged property, needing new identification cards, or having complaints about U.S. forces. It was also a meeting place for Iraqi municipal officials working with the Marines to rebuild the infrastructure of the city following the battles for Fallujah in 2004 and from ongoing combat operations. The

various municipal departments of the city of Fallujah met there somewhat regularly to coordinate with the Marines on how to disperse money that had been set aside for rebuilding the city, and it had become, in a way, a sort of government-meeting-place in exile due to violence in the city. As we traveled to the meeting, Joe filled me in on the new mayor.

Like many Iraqis after the U.S. invasion, Mayor Saad Awad Rashid Al-Dulaimi, or "Mayor Saad," was evasive about his background and what he had done during Saddam's rule. Some said he had been a member of the Republican Guard, while others whispered that he was a former insurgent who had tired of al-Qaeda and had cleared out his home village of the Islamists and wanted to do the same in Fallujah. Some said he was one of Chief Faisal's police officers deputized to serve as mayor, whereas others said he had been brought in by Sheik Sattar of the Anbar Awakening movement to clean out the city. Regardless of his past, he became mayor of the city in March 2007 after a secretive meeting where he was selected by the great fathers of Fallujah. While the mystery of how he became mayor and his origins were never conclusively determined, what was clear by the spring of 2007 was that he had been selected due to his dedication to fighting al-Qaeda and was used to leading men. It seemed to be an encouraging development that he had been selected, but as with many politicians, especially in an insurgency environment, it was prudent to wait to see what he would do and determine whether he truly had the interests of the people at heart. I was hopeful but wary.

We met in a nondescript side room of the Development Center and were seated around a large wooden table. Joe and I sat on the margins to observe how things went. Chief Faisal, wearing a light blue collared shirt with his police rank on his collar and dark blue pants, arrived first and was immediately followed by a much younger man wearing a dark suit with a white shirt and red tie. It was the new mayor. He seemed out of place and unsure of himself as he gingerly pulled back a chair at the front of the table to assume a seat. He was young and stocky, in his early thirties, and had a shock of black hair and a thin mustache. Although he sat at the front, it was clear that Chief Faisal was in charge. While the meeting had been billed as the opening session of the Fallujah city council, unfortunately, due in part to security concerns and possibly logistical challenges, none of the city council members attended. Some speculated whether the members had even

gotten the message that the meeting was taking place. Two members of the "sheiks council" also attended, although apparently their leader, Abu Bakr, hadn't, and Joe exchanged friendly looks with them. No need to be impolite to the enemy, we figured. Chief Faisal led most of the discussion and stressed that the city council needed to win the confidence of the people through solving local problems. He complained that Fallujans only had about two hours of power a day and that Al Qaim, an Iraqi town on the Syrian border, had roughly twenty hours a day. He said that the director general in Ramadi, who was a member of the provincial government, needed to resolve this issue and that he had submitted a list of their needs and requirements to the provincial government. He went on to complain that the Iraqi army was not doing its job because it hadn't responded to a security threat it had received advanced warning on. He went on to say that the JCC (Joint Coordination Center), which was the central point for coordinating security in the city and was located at the Government Center in the heart of Fallujah, had passed information to the Iraqi army about an attack thirty minutes prior to its taking place, and they had done nothing in response. I suspected he was referring to the complex attack on the Government Center just prior to my arrival.

Faisal then stressed that each security unit, whether it be the Iraqi army, Iraqi police, etc., needed to be held responsible for their areas of operations. A member of the "sheiks council" suggested that all the key players in Fallujah, such as the city council, the "sheiks council," and members of the security services, needed to meet to clear the air and more firmly establish responsibilities for the government and security services. He also suggested that they collectively needed to spur the courts and lawyers association to more activity so they would process prisoners more quickly. This particular "sheik" also praised Chief Faisal for his work, explaining that it was quite unusual in Iraqi culture to praise another person publicly and that everyone needed to support his efforts. The "sheik" also said that the "sheiks council" felt that their interests would be represented by the Fallujah city council. He also said that the regular FCC meeting location near the police station should be the regular meeting place since this would increase attendance. Finally, he stressed that the city council needed to be active and that the people wouldn't be able to tolerate its being abolished and reconstituted again. The mayor, who did not speak much during this meeting and

appeared to defer to Chief Faisal on what was ostensibly city business, said that the city needed assistance with securing the oil transportation and distribution network of Fallujah, which typically handled about a million liters a month. The meeting concluded, and it was agreed that the next and likely future city council meetings had to take place at the Government Center in Fallujah, if only to improve attendance, but to also demonstrate to the local residents that the city government was functioning.

My key impressions at this time were that sincere efforts had been made to re-establish the Fallujah city council but that violence was still a key concern for its members. It was interesting to note that several members of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council (FTSC) had managed to attend the meeting, apparently not concerned with threats from insurgents, and that they were clearly vying for more local political power. Why they felt the need to publicly praise Chief Faisal in front of us was a mystery, and why they supported an active city council was also curious. Chief Faisal was a confident individual and was stressing the right themes of building a more viable city council that focused on addressing the needs of the people and that the security services needed to be held responsible for the insurgent activities that occurred in their areas of responsibility. While the mayor was reticent, he also struck me as a thoughtful person as he listened closely to the opinions of the “sheiks” and the police chief and seemed to be gathering a sense of the personalities involved and the politics. As we headed back to Camp Fallujah, Joe continued my education. The center of gravity for the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council was a man named Abu Bakr. It was not his given name but one he had appropriated. He was from the Zobai tribe south and east of Fallujah, which was known for being particularly anti-Coalition and for providing leaders to the insurgency. The paramount sheik of the Zobai tribe, the leader of the whole tribe, was a man named Dr. Harith al-Dari, who in addition to his tribal position was also head of the Muslim Scholars Association, which was also closely associated with the insurgency. Like many things in Iraq at that time, it wasn’t exactly clear how Bakr had assumed his position as head of the FTSC, and with the frequent rotations of U.S. military units any wisdom about the organization and its beginnings were lost. One thing Joe stressed, however, was that because the city council consisted of members representing the five main tribes in the area, the Albu Issa, Mohammedi, Jumayli, Zobai, and Halbusi,

and the major professions such as teachers, bankers, doctors, etc., it was more representative than the FTSC, but the real motivation of Bakr was to be appointed to the still-unoccupied Zobai seat on the city council. He had as much incentive to build his organization up at the expense of the city council as to campaign for an appointment to the same council he sought to undermine. It was a murky political environment in Fallujah at this point in my tour, and I loved every minute of it.

A week later I accompanied the Marines back to the Fallujah Development Center to attend the next city council meeting. I was solo this time after seeing Joe off a few days previously, and I hoped attendance would be higher. While the mayor did not attend, attendance was high as the city council's chair and deputy chair were there along with Chief Faisal, the head of the Fallujah Reconstruction Council, and five "sheiks" of the "sheiks council." In total, about fourteen council members out of twenty-one attended. The city council's deputy chair, a man named Kassim, led most of the meeting with Chief Faisal directing the majority of his comments to security issues. Kassim was a member of the council representing a key element of the professional class in the city and wore the clothing of a modern Iraqi. His face had black stubble and his hairline was receding, and he seemed good-natured and easygoing. He stressed that the city council wanted to focus on three issues: security, detainees, and basic services. He said security would only return to Fallujah if the security forces and the people (sheiks, key figures) worked together, that "one without the other cannot solve the problem," and that more force will only cause more problems. He said that not all the people of Fallujah realized that the security forces were there to protect the city and that the responsibility of informing the people fell to the "administrative" side of security, with local leaders working more closely with security forces to educate the public. Chief Faisal said that for too long good and evil had been mixed in the city and too much evil had spread around the area. He also said that some of the people in the room may have been involved and that for too long people were waiting to see which side would win. I

wondered if this was a reference to the “sheiks council.” He said that we had a historic opportunity to solve the problems of Fallujah and that the Iraqi army (IA), Iraqi police (IP), and Coalition Forces were working hard. Kassim observed that Chief Faisal was a winning “lottery ticket” and that he and his people were sacrificing daily. He also said that peaceful solutions were not the only option and that Chief Faisal was doing what was needed to bring security to the area. In order to help him, the sheiks and *muktars* (local notables) of the city needed to assist the security effort by not only registering, reporting, and taking responsibility for residents from outside Fallujah who were visiting the city but also by participating in local security planning with Iraqi and Coalition security forces. Chief Faisal then called for the creation of a list of Fallujah *muktars* with each of their neighborhoods. Kassim then said that each *muktar* would be responsible for security in his area; they would be included in security planning, consulted for projects in their respective areas, and consulted on important subjects. A *muktar* was a local notable from a particular area of the city who during the Saddam era would have been in charge of the local census of a neighborhood as well as for reporting on the goings-on of the inhabitants. The *muktar* played a crucial role in Saddam’s system of oppression, and Chief Faisal wanted to use them instead as a tool of liberation to free the people of Fallujah from the insurgents.

It was then Chief Faisal’s turn to speak. He said that the security forces were working as one against the *takfiris*, a term meaning apostate that the Iraqis used to describe al-Qaeda. He said that he had recently changed the local curfew to 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. in response to recent security concerns. At this point one council member said that the members needed to be informed of these changes because the people were asking why the times had been changed. Faisal said that he had called Kassim and he had approved the change. Faisal said that while security was not good right now, it would improve in the next two weeks because he had met with the Coalition Forces and reviewed security in the city and that two battalions of Provincial Security Forces (PSFs) would soon deploy to the area. Faisal suggested that they also consider mandatory enlistment and that with a force of between one thousand and two thousand men, Fallujans would be able to solve their own security problems as long as they received some Coalition support. Chief Faisal went on to say that the Iraqi police and

Marines were doing magnificent work and were fighting against the terrorists every day and his men often went to sleep at 5 a.m. after working all night against al-Qaeda. He stated that through intelligence sharing with the Coalition his men had been able to go after al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) aggressively and that his quick reaction forces were ready to go against AQI any time of the day. He stated that AQI was getting desperate by using chlorine gas attacks and that a neighborhood in Fallujah had had its power turned off because it had supported the Iraqi police. Faisal then said he wanted to bring the security level of Fallujah to what it had been before the invasion of Iraq and that U.S. forces had brought security to Fallujah and had sacrificed a lot to do it. He said that the Coalition would be happy if Iraqis were able to bring security to Fallujah themselves and that he would stop every *takfiri* until he was killed himself. Chief Faisal emphasized that he treated all his prisoners equally and that when his sister's brother-in-law was brought in he kept him in jail the same amount of time as the other prisoners. He said he would reject any bribe and that because he and the people of Iraq had been oppressed a long time, he did not intend to oppress the people or his prisoners.

Following his statements there was much discussion about the issue of "refugees" or "outsiders" who moved between Fallujah, Ramadi, and Baghdad. There was agreement within the council that these types of people were causing a number of security problems and that something needed to be done about these non-Fallujans. It was significant to me that their sense of identity and pride was closely linked to the city. Following this discussion there appeared to be an agreement to stop allowing "refugees" to enter the city for a month and that *muktars* would be made responsible for registering visitors with the Iraqi police and for the actions of outsiders. The FCC agreed to identify at least four *muktars* per sector, and then the discussion turned to detainees. Next, the possibility of having personal security details (PSDs) for the city council members was then discussed, and Chief Faisal said he had requested the names of council family members in order to provide them with weapons to be part of a PSD element but no one had yet given him any names.

I was impressed by the thoroughness of the city council meeting and that the police and the council members were talking about real issues in a serious way. This was a significant departure from my experience with local

government in Afghanistan, where the people were not experienced with a functioning government and local officials felt little need to be sensitive to local opinion since most officials were appointed by the central government. Overall, the meeting was well-organized and well-run, and members talked about the key issues of the city. All of these were good signs. The council members stressed the need to solve issues themselves and praised the cooperation they'd received from Coalition Forces. The fact that members publicly praised Chief Faisal and the work he was doing was a good indication that our own assessments of his activities were pretty close to the mark. It was a good sign too that city council members were willing to challenge Faisal on some issues. This suggested they were not unduly intimidated by him and there was a proper relationship between civilian and police authority. There appeared to be strong interest in good governance and responsible management, and it seemed evident to me that the municipal departments had to be involved in the council's meetings in order for all the parts of local governance—police, city council, and municipal government—to function smoothly. As I stated in my report at the time: "If we have similar attendance at next week's meeting we will know if this meeting of the FCC was a blip or the start of a trend."

The pieces and parts of local government were present in Fallujah, but they weren't knitted together in the right way. The central person to do this was Mayor Saad, but with his absence at the city council meeting I was unsure about his motivations. On April 21, I joined the Marine Civil Affairs unit in the city for a meeting with the mayor, ostensibly to feel him out and to get a better sense of him as a leader. We journeyed to the Fallujah Government Center in the heart of the city and met him at the mayor's office. The center was a fortified square of security and governance in Fallujah surrounded by a series of interlocking concrete walls and observation posts protecting the central police station for Fallujah, which itself was also surrounded by its own blast walls and protective fences, barracks for the Iraqi army, which had formerly been a city administrative building, and then finally the mayor's office. The mayor's office was situated near the entrance to the

Government Center, but unlike the rest of the buildings there it did not have any protective blast walls. When al-Qaeda launched its suicide truck bomb attack in March, it not only devastated the entrance to Fallujah's "little Green Zone" but also shattered the mayor's building, which also hosted the city council meetings, blasting out its windows and opening huge fissures in the walls. The main sewage line had also been shattered by an additional car bomb that had struck the western portion of the compound and caused the mayor's backyard to fill with human waste a few times a week. The effluent would cover the whole one-thousand-square-foot area, and the building itself had sporadic electricity. It gave a new meaning to "being in the shit."

The Marines and I met in an unoccupied side room to discuss things with the mayor. It was an easygoing meeting, and the mayor stressed his great interest in bringing security to the city and his goals of improving city services. He brought a notebook and appeared keen to speak with us. A few minutes later, city council chairman Sheik Sami Abdul Amir al-Jumayli arrived from Baghdad, where he had been attending meetings with government officials. Sami was in his early sixties, although with life being so hard in Iraq many Iraqis looked much older than their age, and he dressed in the flowing robes of a tribal elder. His hair was gray and he was unshaven, and he apologized to the mayor for his tardiness. While the substance of their conversation is lost to me, the key event of this meeting was when Abu Bakr, the ostensible head of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council, invited himself to the meeting. Bakr had a stocky build and was of medium stature, and he had a thick black beard that framed his round face. According to my predecessor Joe, Bakr was always calculating, looking for some advantage, and his raffish demeanor stood in contrast to the flowing gold-trimmed robes and *thobe* he wore that day to effect the look of a tribal sheik. It was remarkable to me that his garb was at least superficially finer than that of Sheik Sami, who was actually a tribal sheik. I suppose when you have power you don't need to flaunt it. A previous unit in Fallujah had once described Bakr as the "Alexander Hamilton" of Fallujah, a founding father, if you will, of a new beginning for the city. Others, however, were more suspicious of him and his organization. His weekly "sheiks" meeting always drew the attendance of Coalition Forces, but many of Bakr's colleagues were former Baathists, and his grasping nature, always looking for power, alienated many. Bakr was jovial with the mayor and Sami and

spoke supportively about the city council. It would be a fateful meeting for Sheik Sami.

Hours later, after I had returned to base, I was passing through the tactical operations center of Special Operations Task Force–West when one of our intelligence analysts caught my attention and asked me if I had heard the news. I wasn't sure what she was referring to, but she said that Sheik Sami had been killed and the reporting suggested he had been gunned down by four assailants in a black Opel car. I was dumbstruck. I had been in the country for all of two weeks and had been encouraged by the meetings I had attended, so I was overwhelmed by the news. I realized, however, that this was what the insurgents wanted us to do, to pull back from the city council and set aside plans to make local government viable. So I was determined to press on. As news came in during the day, it seemed as if Sheik Sami had left the mayor's office about two and half hours after the Marines and I had departed, when a black car approached him as he walked home. Four gunmen ran up to him with AK-47s and riddled his body with bullets. Members of the Jumayli tribe were already pledging revenge for the attack, and I feared that the nascent local government we were trying to build would be stillborn.

The effects of the murder on the city council were dramatic and swift. When the Marines and I attended the next council meeting at the Government Center on April 24, three days after the murder, it was a ghost town. The insurgents had achieved the effect they desired. Attendance had evaporated, and as I sat in the city council's room, which was little more than a few chairs arranged into a rectangle, and felt the breeze slink into the room through the broken windows and fissures in the walls caused by the March suicide attack, I figured that this was what a desiccated community must feel like: battered, bruised, and defeated. While none of the council members attended, Mayor Saad did, along with the leader of the "sheiks council," Abu Bakr, and other members of his group. It was again curious that they had managed to attend and appeared to be unconcerned with the al-Qaeda threat. The assassination of Sheik Sami reinforced the already strong concern of the mayor and other members of the city council with security, not just their own, although they certainly saw this as being most important, but with the city's as well. The mayor opened the meeting by bluntly asking what his responsibilities were and what he should do. He

also asked aloud whether U.S. forces actually supported him because, in his view, no efforts had been made to improve his security and that of the city council. The mayor specifically cited the fact that several Hesco baskets, the wire and mesh baskets used as walls when filled with dirt, had been dropped off at his office but that he lacked the ability to fill them, and he said that he and his security detail had not yet received weapons cards. The mayor also said that many people were saying that because he hadn't done anything yet as mayor (he had been mayor approximately twenty-one days) he should resign. The mayor seemed inclined to take this course of action but appeared to be waiting to see if we would back him.

Colonel Simcock expressed his deep concern with Sheik Sami's assassination and said that a strong city council was needed to defeat al-Qaeda. He went on to say that we could not let the terrorists win, which they would if the city council and the mayor didn't meet regularly and if the mayor didn't show some leadership. The mayor quickly jumped on this last comment and asked rhetorically how the city council's members were expected to attend without security. Following this statement, Simcock and his executive officer discussed how weapons and weapons cards had been distributed to the police. Chief Faisal then asked the members to provide him with the names of family members and friends who could serve as a personal security detail for the city council members, but that the members had not responded to these requests. He went on to say that Coalition Forces were willing to provide one AK-47, two magazines, and sixty rounds each to one personal security detail (PSD) for each council member as long as we received the names of the individuals. Following this extended discussion, Simcock introduced Sam Frank, a U.S. State Department diplomat, as someone who had come from Washington, D.C., to help the mayor figure out his responsibilities. He was leading the new embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Fallujah and would seek to partner with the local government. Frank was a former enlisted Marine who had gone the route of many Marines and joined the State Department to be a regional security officer after he had left the Marine Corps. He was not a diplomat in the conventional sense (nor, for that matter, had I been when I had gone to Afghanistan), but he was there to help. The mayor replied testily that he didn't need the help of someone from Washington, D.C., but he did need immediate help from Coalition Forces. The mayor said he

didn’t “know what his right or left hands were doing” and that he would resign if he didn’t get any help. He said he had no vehicles or weapons and that his building was open to sniper fire. He said the Coalition had lots of security and could get around but that he was restricted to staying at his compound. Tensions were high, and we definitely needed to meet privately with the mayor.

In a private meeting in the mayor’s conference room Colonel Simcock introduced Sam Frank and me as his advisers on governance and said we both spoke for him. I was definitely having some luck at integrating myself into the efforts of the Marines. Maj. Andy Dietz and CWO4 Steven Townsley from the Marine Civil Affairs group also attended. Following this brief introduction, Simcock left to go to another meeting, and discussions began about a way forward for the mayor. The mayor said his personal security was his paramount concern before he would be able to govern the city effectively. A few days previously, one of the mayor’s security guards had been shot in the side of the face by a sniper as he was standing in front of the mayor’s office. He hadn’t been killed, but a large gash had been cut along his face, and the mayor had paid for his surgery out of his own pocket. The mayor requested that he and his security detail be issued weapons cards and that some mix of Hesco baskets, “T-walls,” and sandbags be erected around his office so that another sniper attack couldn’t happen and so his building could resist another car bomb attack. A large, abandoned multistory building that had significant battle damage loomed over the mayor’s office and the Government Center and was a prime position for snipers as well as for spotters for mortar teams. He also wanted to fix some of the building’s structural deficiencies and make other repairs brought about by the previous month’s suicide attack. If he was able to get these things accomplished, he would feel more secure and could govern more effectively.

Frank and I agreed to look into these requests, and the mayor promised to give us a name of a contractor he trusted who could perform the needed work. We then discussed some basic ideas of a way forward for the mayor. I suggested that we needed to work with him on Fallujah’s relationship with the provincial government and Baghdad, his relationship with the city government, and his connection to the people. The mayor said that he was more than ready to begin to govern once his security was taken care of and

that he wanted to hear more of our ideas later. The mayor said that if security could be fixed in Fallujah, the governing part would go smoothly. He then mentioned that he had four hundred people (whether they were locals or not is unknown) who were willing to join and fight al-Qaeda if only they had the support of U.S. forces. At this suggestion, we recommended that the mayor have the men sign up at the next Iraqi police recruiting drive and contact Chief Faisal about his idea.

It was clear that more needed to be done if the mayor was going to be able to do his job. I was impressed by his apparent sincerity at getting his office in order so he could provide the kinds of services the people of Fallujah so desperately wanted. His sense of public-mindedness was in such contrast to the views of most Afghan officials I encountered, and while more time was needed to see how he performed, I was definitely encouraged by what I had seen thus far, and I sought opportunities to support him in whatever way I could with the meager resources at my disposal. As the Marines and I made plans I finally attended one of the meetings of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council four days later at a nondescript building just outside of the Government Center.

A number of groups sought to fill the political vacuum created by the dissolution of the Iraqi government following the U.S. invasion and subsequent decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority. Many of them presented themselves as the “true” representatives of the people, and they took many forms, such as simple neighborhood groups seeking to resolve local issues or broad sectarian coalitions speaking for a people. The challenge for U.S. forces was sorting out these various organizations, determining which of them, if any, genuinely represented the people, and figuring out how to work with them to create a viable Iraqi state. Besides the usual groups of individuals who claimed to speak for the people and were quickly dismissed by Coalition Forces’ leaders, an organization called the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council (FTSC) emerged as the most credible among a host of poor choices in the Fallujah area. The group presented itself as the institutional representative of area sheiks and *muktars*. The

group's leader, Abu Bakr, always festooned in what we had always assumed was traditional sheik garb, convened weekly meetings where he would lead discussions on issues of local concern. Joe had told me that Bakr regularly either castigated Coalition Forces or asked them for special dispensations for "sheiks council" members or "the people" they represented, all the while maintaining his position as the organization's leader. It was with great interest that I attended one of their meetings on April 28 at their headquarters just outside the Government Center in downtown Fallujah.

I sat down in the cramped meeting room and took a survey of the faces in the group. It was a hodgepodge of people, some with gray hair dressed in traditional Arab garb and others in loose-fitting and modern professional clothing. The whole group had a haphazard quality to it, but the men I worried the most about were the young men in the back of the room. If my colleague Joe's views were correct, this whole cabal was the source of many of our troubles in Fallujah, from assassinating government officials to colluding with if not leading the insurgency and undermining the government's authority in the city. In a strange way, it was also the safest place in Fallujah at that time since al-Qaeda would not likely attack a meeting of its erstwhile leaders. Abu Bakr was seated at the front of the room and began the meeting, the primary topic of which was the issue of detainees. This particular topic was ready-made for a group seeking to gain political support from the people because local residents always wanted their relatives released, and this gave the "sheiks council" an opportunity to gather support by advocating for them. It also helped the insurgency by bolstering their numbers due to accidentally released insurgent fighters.

Specifically, the "sheiks" asked for more compassion from Coalition Forces on this particular issue. They complained that too often detainees were released from Coalition detention facilities and then transferred to the Iraqi police, where they would continue to be held for an indeterminate amount of time. The "sheiks" asked for help from the Coalition in facilitating the release of detainees held by the IP and that we also help procure food and decent living arrangements for the men while they were being held. Abu Bakr cited the example of a man who had been held by Coalition Forces for three years and was then given over to the IP and continued to be held for what was then approaching two months. The "sheiks" asked Coalition Forces to revise their process for releasing

detainees by giving the men over to their families and empowering *muktars* with the authority to monitor their behavior and be held responsible for any potential actions they may be involved in. The “sheiks” welcomed the investigation of detainees but requested that if nothing was found on a man that he be quickly released. The “sheiks” also cautioned that too many people were being detained on fraudulent or weak intelligence and that many innocent people were being detained. Abu Bakr specifically said he didn’t want to tell Coalition Forces how to do their jobs but only to express the concerns of many of the members of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council.

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At-Ta'Mim
Tikrit
Salahlad-Din
Kermanshah
Al Qaim
Haditha
Diyala
Hit
Habbaniyah
Ramadi
Baghdad
Fallujah
Al-Anbar
Rutbah
Kut
Babil
Karbala
Wasit
Tigris
Dezful
Najaf
Al-Qadisiyah
Maysan
Euphrates
Ahvaz
Dhi Qar
An Najaf
Nasiriyah
Basra
Al-Basrah
Al-Muthanna
Kuwait City

Combat Observation Post Fenton along Route 10 in Fallujah in 2007
Daniel R. Green

Lt. Col. William Mullen (center) visits an entry control point in Fallujah in 2007.
U.S. Navy

CWO4 Steve Townsley speaks with local resident of Fallujah in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Fallujah police chief Colonel Faisal Ismael Hussein al-Zobai (just right of center and closest to camera) prepares to conduct one of his “pep rallies” at the beginning of a swarm in Fallujah.
Combat Camera, 2nd Marine Division

Fallujah city council meeting at their newly refurbished building in 2007
Daniel R. Green

Jumayli Paramount Sheik Meshan (left) and Albu Issa Paramount Sheik Khamis attend a Fallujah city council meeting in 2007.
U.S. Navy

Jumayli tribesmen graduate from police training at Camp Baharia in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

A U.S. Marine pats down Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council chairman “Sheik” Abu Bakr before a Fallujah city council meeting in 2007.
U.S. Navy

U.S. military personnel attend a lunch with Jumayli tribal leaders in Fallujah in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Lt. Daniel R. Green provides keys to an up-armored sport utility vehicle to Fallujah mayor Saad in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Local war widows receive children's clothing and school supplies from the Fallujah mayor's office in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Father John Gayton conducts religious services for Echo company at one of their Joint Security Stations.
Combat Camera, 2nd Marine Division

Decorated security barriers in Fallujah in 2007
Daniel R. Green

A Fallujah police officer speaks to neighborhood watch recruits as they await screening in 2007.
U.S. Marine Corps

U.S. Marines visit a neighborhood store during a swarm operation in Fallujah in 2007.
Courtesy of Maj. Jeff McCormack

Sergeant Cummings (USMC) leads a security class for recently recruited neighborhood watch members in Fallujah in 2007.
Courtesy of Maj. Jeff McCormack

Albu Issa tribesmen provide security near their paramount sheik's home in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Iraqi artist decorates a security barrier at the Fallujah mayor's compound in 2007.
Daniel R. Green

Fallujah residents attend a parade along Route 10 to honor local security forces in 2008.
U.S. Marine Corps

Fallujah security forces screen residents entering the city of Fallujah at the “Blackwater” Bridge in 2008.
U.S. Marine Corps

Following these opening statements, the Marines said that a current list of detainees had been brought to the meeting and that we welcomed its review by the “sheiks” if they had any additional information about the actions or situations of various prisoners. Additionally, they mentioned that the Fallujah police had just recently released eighty-six prisoners and that more were on the way. They also said that several Iraqi judges had been in town to review pending cases and that this would ease the overcrowding issues at the Fallujah jail. One “sheik” asked about the status of “Sheik” Shakir, a “sheik” who had recently been picked up by Coalition Forces. The Marines indicated that they were not aware of his current status but promised to look into the case. (“Sheik” Shakir had been picked up based on his activities with al-Qaeda in Iraq.) The conversation then turned to the entry control points that surrounded the city. Specifically, the “sheiks” wanted the Marines to consider opening the bridge near the dam and some

adjustments to ECP 1A and 2 to facilitate traffic movement. “Sheik” Bakr said that because the Marines had not really responded to these repeated complaints they were not respecting the “sheiks,” which struck me as an obvious attempt to position us to respond to the complaints of the “sheiks council” in such a way as to demonstrate its power. At this assertion, the Marines said that the mayor of Fallujah and the city council needed to address these issues and that to the best of our knowledge they were, in fact, in discussions with Coalition Forces to potentially resolve these matters. Bakr said that the city council members should attend their meetings or be fired. He then said that the “sheiks” of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council represented approximately 75 percent of the city and were the “rebar in the concrete of the city.” He said they worked day and night for their people, versus what he intimated was the general laxity of the city council. He then went on to say that the refugees in the city needed help and that some “sheiks” hadn’t attended today’s meeting because they’d been giving as much aid as they could to the people and didn’t want to be in the position of being unable to assist people in need who had allegedly come to the meeting.

The meeting with the “sheiks council” members revealed much about their intentions and capabilities. It was clear that they sought to gain power by persuasion if possible but mostly through violence, and because they had so few resources they were trying to leverage our capabilities to their ends. Where they couldn’t persuade they would bombast, and when this didn’t work they’d return to cajoling. Bakr revealed himself as the power-hungry individual my colleague Joe had told me about, and while he was adept at changing his strategies to get Coalition Forces to do things for him, he was basically without power. Bakr was clearly trying to position himself as a genuine city-wide leader who voiced the frustration of the people of Fallujah. He hoped to bolster his democratic and leadership credentials by claiming to have broad support among the people and by expressing the legitimate frustrations of residents. I concluded my report from that time with the following observations: “All of these actions [by Bakr] are being taken, in my estimation, in order to position himself as a possible candidate for either the head of the Fallujah city council or some other city-wide position, possibly mayor. While evidence is still lacking as to who was behind the killing of Sheik Sami, the most recent head of the FCC, this

political posturing by Abu Bakr certainly raises some questions as to motive."

In seeking to win a counterinsurgency fight, one of the keys to gaining influence with the population is to allow them forms of self-governance with which they are familiar. One of these forms, the city council, was already functioning to a degree, but the other, the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council, caused more issues than the city council ever did. The "players" in the "sheiks council" were harder to identify, while the influence they had throughout the city was equally difficult to measure. For the first of these two issues, identifying the true "players" was something that we worked on the entire time I was in the Fallujah area during both deployments. It was difficult to determine because we were using what we understood through the lens of our own culture to try and determine who was important in their culture.

One of the means of determining who was a "player" and who was not was by watching how everyone reacted to a person entering a room. The Iraqis have a term for how much respect or influence someone has: *wasta*. When someone with much *wasta* entered a room, all conversations stopped and everyone moved to greet the person. It did not matter what was going on; even if the meeting was in full swing with a heated debate, if a person with great *wasta* came in, everything stopped. This could prove quite disruptive at times, especially since the Iraqis we dealt with were almost always late. Being "on time" for them could be anywhere from fifteen to forty-five minutes late. There was never any excuse offered for their being late.

As for the issue of measuring the influence of tribal members, we found this was almost impossible to determine. The tribes were influential outside the confines of the city proper, but since Fallujah was always a trading site, the population was mixed. Several different tribes all had members in the city. How much they owed their allegiance to their own tribe was an open question. The benefit of tribal membership in the countryside was that the sheik could help the members of the tribe, who were more scattered than in

a city, by gaining benefits for the tribe and passing judgment on disputes. Some of the larger, better organized tribes also had their own form of police, though they were untrained by any Western standard. In the city, however, there were police and occasionally judges to arbitrate disputes. People could also make their own living with a small business or by working at one of the larger businesses. There was no real need for the largesse that a tribal sheik could dispense in the countryside.

When we returned to Fallujah, the "sheiks council" was functioning with "Sheik" Abu Bakr as its head. We could only assume that since he had been allowed to lead this organization, he must have produced beneficial outcomes from his meetings and was working well with Coalition Forces. By the time we arrived in the city, he seemed to be a much shadier character. His weekly meetings always drew the attendance of Coalition Forces, but many of Bakr's colleagues were former Baathists. In spring 2007 he was at the height of his influence. He would attend the city council meetings in addition to the "sheiks council" meetings and would spend hours lecturing the city council on its shortcomings as an organization. We also noticed that he did not appear to have much *wasta* with the city council. He would arrive late and most would look over to see who came in and return to the business at hand.

The main issue with Abu Bakr was the influence he had away from city council meetings. It was clear he wanted the "sheiks council" to be the power brokers in the city, and he always seemed to be scheming for ways to make this happen. Some of his methods were more obvious than others. He once passed word to the city council's members that the meeting time and location had changed, although he showed up relatively on time and at the right location. When we asked him where everyone else was, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "I do not know, but what can you expect, they are all afraid." This was after several city council chairmen in a row, as well as several members of the council, had been assassinated. Unfortunately, we had reporting suggesting that Abu Bakr had a hand in the assassinations by providing the insurgents with information regarding the movements of the targets. We had no way of confirming this, but it did not help with our willingness to trust him. At the next city council meeting, after we had ensured that everyone knew exactly where and when it would occur, we

asked some of the members why they had missed the last one. It was then that we discovered that Abu Bakr had told them the misleading information.

To make matters worse with regard to Abu Bakr, when he became uncomfortable with us attending his "sheiks council" meetings due to the questions we were asking, he tried to get us to stop attending by saying we were being specifically targeted. My battalion executive officer, Maj. George Benson, was the member of my staff who normally attended these meetings. Bakr mentioned him by name as being the one targeted for an ambush. For an Iraqi, word that you are being targeted would generally be sufficient to make you keep a low profile or head for Jordan or Syria. Bakr must have assumed that Benson would be discouraged from attending the weekly meeting because of the threat. Needless to say, it had no impact on what we intended to do. We were always a target, so being mentioned specifically was not much of a twist on an old theme. We also decided to try and ambush those targeting Benson. We put a sniper team in an overwatch of the building where the "sheiks council" met and had a quick reaction force staged nearby to come to the assistance of Benson and the squad protecting him. His arrival at the meeting proved uneventful, but when Bakr showed up, he was clearly surprised and nonplussed that his warnings had had no effect. He was not the usual calm, self-assured sheik that he portrayed on most occasions, and he stumbled about at the meeting's start. I have no doubt that we kept him from getting to his true agenda.

In the city council meetings, I had begun to take steps to limit his impact on the meetings themselves. Whenever he would stand up to address the council, I would start to rebut everything he would bring up. I was never belligerent, but I made it clear I would not sit silently and listen to him berate the council and Coalition Forces, especially with his track record of deceit. They all knew that I was the commander of Marine forces in the city, and because of that fact and because I am 6′3″ and about 215 pounds, they accorded me more respect than usual for an outsider. I was also confident when I spoke and had my facts lined up. I say all this because it was a significant factor in some of the success I had in dealing with Iraqis. They respected the factors mentioned above, and that gave me *wasta*. I used this *wasta* to limit the negative effects that Bakr was having on the council, and it worked. After the first couple of times I challenged him in the council's

presence, he stopped speaking, and his attendance at the meetings soon became sporadic.

Issues with Bakr came to a head around mid-May when he approached me just as the weekly city council meeting was breaking up. Speaking through an interpreter, he asked me why we were asking so many questions about him and why I in particular seemed so angry with him. It was with great pleasure that I recounted what we knew of him, then hinted at what we suspected he was doing around the city. He protested his innocence and said he himself had been kidnapped by al-Qaeda and thus was not one of them. My reply was that he certainly looked healthy for someone al-Qaeda had kidnapped, since everyone else that had been kidnapped by them had lost his head. The interpreter had a difficult time getting this out because he was laughing, but enough of it came across to Bakr that he stopped talking and immediately left the meeting. It was many months before we saw him again. By the fall, when we finally started seeing him again, he was a shadow of his former self, skulking around the precinct councils we had helped to establish and trying to regain some of the political power he had once possessed, while keeping a close eye out for those who wanted to kill him.

On May 1, the city council met again, this time at the Government Center downtown, and attendance was back to normal levels. An empty chair stood at the front of the room while the council members sat around the table and the Marines and I sat at the edge of the room. The presence of Sheik Sami was sorely missed. The heat had started to become unbearable, and with the windows to the meeting room still broken, a thin layer of dust had settled on everything as waves of heat wafted in. The mayor attended as well as Chief Faisal and Abu Bakr, and the first order of business was choosing a new head of the Fallujah city council. Since Kassim, the deputy chair, was unwilling to assume the mantle of responsibility, attention turned to the men sitting around the table. Of the fifteen members there that day, out of a total of eighteen, most looked at their notebooks or were otherwise evasive. One of the members, however, volunteered, a soft-spoken representative of the

Halbusi tribe north of Fallujah and one of the four tribal representatives on the council. He was dressed in white with a white head covering and a black band and was an out-of-work schoolteacher with a thick mustache and a kindly look. His name was Sheik Hamid Ahmed Hashim, and he had decided to lead the city council at this difficult time and brave the insurgency's threats. It was a brave act with profoundly positive results, but all that was in the future.

While the council discussed ways of altering entry control points for faster traffic flow into the city, possible compensation for property damage due to combat operations, and appropriate ways to search females entering the city, the dominant theme of the meeting was the assassination of Sheik Sami. Chief Faisal said that following the interrogation of a suspect in the assassination of Sheik Sami, he knew who the killers were and would announce his findings at the next meeting. Faisal told each of the council members to attend next week's meeting (as opposed to asking them), including those not present, and said that people on the council were responsible for the death of Sheik Sami. Chief Faisal said that he did not have enough police officers to provide a security detail to each member of the council and requested again that its members provide him with a list of up to three or four names of family members to perform this function. The members started a list and passed it around the room. Violence was starting to focus people on the tasks at hand. The mayor then returned to the subject of revising entry control points into the city to quicken traffic flow. The Marines agreed that this was a good idea and pledged to work with the mayor and Chief Faisal on a plan that would alter certain entry control points. This was a useful and public repudiation of "Sheik" Abu Bakr. There was also some discussion about the appropriate manner with which to check women entering the city. Chief Faisal said he would resolve this issue and that he did not care if someone was offended because women were searched thoroughly.

In less than four weeks I had been dropped into the drama of Fallujah civic life, and while there were no angels among the key players, evil had a face and it was determined. The police chief, the mayor, and the head of the Fallujah city council were as resolute to do the right thing as anyone could expect, but security in the city was not to the point that politics was ready to take over from combat as the arena of conflict for local residents. We had to

support the mayor more assertively and stitch together the various pieces of local government more tightly while marginalizing the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council. With the numerous changes taking place in Al-Anbar Province due to the Anbar Awakening, it seemed as if the contagion of insurgency was receding. The insurgents in Fallujah didn’t know it yet, but they soon would.

|| Chapter 6 ||

Operation Alljah

The purpose in deploying static units is to establish a grid of troops so that the population and the counterinsurgent political teams are reasonably well protected, and so that the troops can participate in civic action at the lowest level.

David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 78

When looking at what needed to be done in Fallujah, the essential ingredient to changing conditions for good was providing a sense of security to the inhabitants. Up to that point, they had been caught in the middle between Coalition Forces and the insurgents. They did not like either and mostly focused on surviving the conflict. During their previous deployment, many Marines in the 2nd Battalion 6th Marines thought every Iraqi in Fallujah was an insurgent sympathizer because the Iraqis failed to provide information or assistance with catching or killing the insurgents. What many Marines did not understand was that the people of Fallujah felt powerless to take a side, because if they were found with weapons, even weapons to protect themselves and their families, they were automatically assumed to be an insurgent. If they provided information or assistance to Coalition Forces, the insurgents targeted them. Since the police and Iraqi soldiers were not providing effective security, no one was. This had to change.

The most frustrating aspect of counterinsurgency warfare is that if one is not clearly winning, one is losing. The enemy's job is easier in that all they have to do is create mayhem and the impression the government cannot provide security for the population. When the people do not feel secure, they either sit on the fence to await the outcome or side with those they think will win. In some cases, threats of violence or death to them or their family members coerced them into supporting the insurgents. Since they are largely unarmed, they have no choice but to comply. I often thought about the dilemma of the average Fallujans; they had been essentially caught in the middle since 2003, and most were just trying to survive. One would see kids going to school in the morning, fresh-faced and clowning around as kids all over the world have a tendency to do. One would see people going to the markets to get food and everyday items for their homes. One would see the devout walking to the mosques several times a day. When the violence started, one would see all of them dive for cover or scramble into a doorway in an attempt to avoid harm. I could not imagine having to live that way. I have no doubt they all suffered from some degree of post-traumatic stress.

The dilemma we faced was that in a fight of this nature, it is the people sitting on the fence who will decide who wins. We came from a different culture and did not speak their language, and the Iraqis had been taught all their lives to hate us. How could we reach the people in the middle and give them a reason to get off the fence? A general rule in this kind of warfare is that 10 percent of any given population will support the government no matter what. They have staked their lives on the government's winning and will never change sides—the insurgents will most likely torture and murder them to set an example. About the same percentage are just as firmly committed to the insurgents, and one cannot win them over to the government's side. They may not always be actively fighting, but they are providing information and support to the insurgents. Subsequently, both sides are competing to win the loyalty and support of the remaining 80 percent of the population to get them off the fence. The position these people occupy is certainly understandable. Taking sides is a life-or-death matter since they can be detained for supporting insurgents, which in many countries is a virtual death sentence, or targeted by the insurgents for openly

supporting the government. It is never an easy choice. They are truly between the proverbial “rock and a hard place.”

What became painfully obvious to us in the first month of our deployment was that the approach we had been using was not working. I was seeing the same sort of violence I had seen on my previous tour, only it was now substantially worse. It seemed like a never-ending round of the arcade game “Whack-a-mole.” The insurgents conducted IED, mortar, and sniper attacks, while we conducted targeted raids and around-the-clock security patrols. Both sides were taking and causing casualties, but neither side was making any clear progress toward a final solution. Civilians were caught in the middle, and there was no end in sight for them either. To make matters worse, weighing heavily on our minds was the knowledge that the American people were getting impatient with the lack of progress. The news at home regarding the Iraq War was uniformly dismal. It seemed that the media never covered anything positive, and the diatribes coming from Congress could be disheartening. In addition, the fact that General Petraeus, the overall commander in Iraq, was due to return to the United States in September to testify before Congress on what was happening in Iraq also put self-imposed pressure on us. If the situation failed to turn around quickly, our overall mission in Iraq would end in failure as we would pull out and leave the Iraqis to figure it out for themselves. In our minds, that meant two things: all of our fellow Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen who had died or been horribly wounded would have done so in vain. For the Iraqis we knew and worked with, it could mean chaos, civil war, and massive civilian casualties.

In trying to come up with a plan to turn Fallujah away from chaos and violence and toward a better, more secure future, we discussed a number of options in our battalion headquarters. Opinions varied as to what measures to take. Some wanted us to pull back to the city’s perimeter and let the Iraqi army sort it out, while others wanted a serious crackdown and tightening of control over the city. Regardless of anyone’s stance, though, we were unanimous in the opinion we had to provide security to the people of Fallujah. We knew that if we could get the locals to take our side, they would report on enemy activity and thereby prevent the enemy from operating in their city. Instead of the insurgents “swimming in the sea of the people” as Mao Zedong once put it, there would be hostile eyes

everywhere. The insurgents would not be able to bear such scrutiny; we would drain the sea and with it the insurgents' support. It had happened elsewhere and it could happen in Fallujah.

We also recognized that we were at a tipping point in Fallujah. The pressure from the Al-Anbar Awakening was building to our west and was flowing east toward Fallujah. New leaders were in place for the Iraqi army and police, and there was also a new mayor, and all of them were energetic and willing to work hard to restore security. This was a new situation in Fallujah, and it was something our immediate predecessors had worked hard to get. We would be able to reap the benefits of their hard work in this regard.

Another factor, and something that was referred to earlier, was that al-Qaeda in Iraq was overplaying its hand. Its operatives were killing Iraqi civilians on a regular basis without rhyme or reason. They were reportedly taking Iraqi women as wives in deals that no one could refuse. They were also trying to institute sharia law again, as they had prior to Operation Al Fajr, in areas they controlled. It was not working. One specific example was when they tried to ban cigarette smoking and started forcibly collecting cartons and boxes of cigarettes they would find in stores. Fallujans are for the most part certainly religious, but they are not fundamentalists by any standard, and they *love* their cigarettes. Telling them they were not allowed to smoke was a serious irritant, and it did not go over well. Just before we had arrived, our predecessors had discovered where al-Qaeda in Iraq was storing the cigarettes they had collected and made a raid on the warehouse. They confiscated the cigarettes and handed them back out to the Fallujans.

When casting about for an example to work from, we noticed that Ramadi had gotten quiet and security had significantly improved. On my previous deployment, Ramadi had been a terribly violent place; in some ways it had been worse than Fallujah, but no one had the appetite to conduct another Operation Al Fajr there. A year earlier, Ramadi had continued to be another perennial hot spot, but now this was no longer the case. The Marine battalion in Ramadi, led by Lt. Col. Bill Jurney, had instituted measures enlisting the local population in its own defense that seemed to be providing security in the sector for which they were responsible. These measures represented a new and innovative approach. The people there had seemingly bought into his plan and were already

starting to take our side in the struggle with the insurgents. Intrigued, I sent Major Benson out to Ramadi to determine specifically what they were doing.

When he returned from Ramadi, he had the shell of a plan already worked out based on what he had seen and heard. He even had a name for it. As he put it, the plan would take the "F U" out of Fallujah, so it should be called Operation Alljah. At first, I was more than a little hesitant about that name since it might be a little hard to explain to higher headquarters. Luckily, the word *alljah* meant something in Arabic also. As my interpreter put it, "you know how when you ask for something over and over, and then finally get it? That is *alljah*!" Given the combination of the two meanings, we decided to use the name. What was even more interesting about his plan was that we had discussed something like it earlier. I had rejected that approach because of concerns based on my previous experience in Fallujah. Benson was initially reluctant to bring it up again, but since something like it was working in Ramadi, he tried once more. I have always tried to be the kind of leader who takes anyone's idea, no matter whose, and if it makes sense and is the most effective way of getting something done, I agree to it even if it is not my idea. I have never cornered the market on good ideas, and George was an intelligent officer with a great deal of common sense. I trusted him implicitly, and it did not take him long to change my mind.

The plan was simple in concept but would prove difficult to execute. It essentially boiled down to breaking Fallujah into ten sectors that we would call precincts to facilitate turning the city over to police control. Each precinct would have traffic control points limiting traffic into and out of the precinct, each of which would be surrounded by a ring of concrete barriers to diminish the car bomb threat. People could walk through the gaps in the concrete barriers, but none of the gaps would be large enough to allow the passage of cars, much less trucks. This struck at the enemy's ability to move about freely in the city and served to curtail their operations. We had already observed that we were dealing with an enemy who loved their cars. If they could not get away quickly in their vehicles, they were reluctant to conduct attacks.

The next step was to bring a surge of police and Marines into the precinct, while the Iraqi army provided a cordon. This surge was called a swarm, and the idea was to make targeted raids throughout the precinct to

stir up the enemy and either detain him or cause him to flee. While this swarm was occurring, other forces would establish a Joint Security Station (JSS) inside the precinct staffed by Iraqi police, soldiers, and Marines together. Once the JSS was established, we would screen local adult males for hiring as neighborhood watch personnel who, though we would not arm them, would work directly for the police, who allowed them to carry arms if they had them. We would provide a week of training, and they would be hired with the understanding that if they performed well, it would increase their chances of a job as a regular police officer. We would also pay them a small stipend, enough to provide them some money but not enough to enable them to rely on the job as a sole source of income. One humorous aspect was that my civil affairs team contracted with a local Iraqi T-shirt maker to make thousands of light blue shirts for the part-time watch and had requested that the letters stating “Neighborhood Watch” on the backs of the shirts be in Arabic and be three inches. The contractor understood this to mean that the letters were to be three inches long and not three inches high, so when the shirts showed up the whole Arabic word was three inches long and only one inch tall. You could barely see it! I often wondered what the watch members thought of their new, collared shirts. The establishment of a neighborhood watch further curtailed enemy activity as there were now eyes everywhere throughout the precinct. Since we provided the watch members a uniform to wear to facilitate recognition of them, they provided a visible presence and started to give the local population a sense that security was returning to their neighborhood.

Once we had established security, the next phase took place. We mounted on top of each JSS a set of speakers like those used on mosques for calls to prayer. We would then broadcast the Iraqi national anthem from these speakers as well as public service announcements and national and international news, and allow local leaders to talk to the community. Once the police had conducted their raids, they would then distribute family aid packages consisting of a three- to four-day supply of food for a family of four. Next we would bring civil affairs teams into the precinct to conduct a survey of the precinct’s needs and develop plans to meet those needs. We gave priority to three services—clean water, sewage removal, and reliable electricity—to improve the quality of life of the average Fallujan in the precinct. Once we had addressed these needs, we would then facilitate the

removal of garbage and rubble from the streets. The rubble removal was particularly important as it was an enormous undertaking, but as long as the rubble existed, it would provide a visible reminder of the fighting and instability the city had suffered since 2003.

The final step was the establishment of local precinct councils, formed and facilitated by the police with Marines to provide a forum to air grievances and to develop Iraqi solutions to the problems facing the community. None of these local councils had actually achieved much up until that time, but many Iraqis enjoy sitting, talking, and smoking, and this gave them a forum to do so. They felt as if they were now a part of the process of bringing Fallujah back to life and ending the cycle of violence that had been a part of their lives for four years. An additional benefit was that it was also a way to identify potential leaders. Since the insurgents had actively targeted many of the previous city leaders, finding capable people who were willing to try and make a difference was difficult, that is, until Alljah picked up momentum and the Iraqis saw that things were going to be different.

As we fleshed out the plan amidst the hectic pace of combat operations throughout the city, it became apparent that the hardest part would not be the implementation itself, but selling the plan to those involved. We had to gain the cooperation of the Iraqi police and army, as well as that of our chain of command, to conduct the plan. It called for immense resources from all over Al-Anbar Province. A perfect example was something as simple as traffic barriers. How would we ever acquire enough concrete barriers to cordon off each separate precinct so that vehicle traffic would be impaired but pedestrian traffic would not? This measure alone required close to a thousand Jersey barriers (twelve-foot-long by three-foot-high cement barriers found on most highways in the United States). Each traffic control point in each precinct required a bunker to protect it from suicide bombers, snipers, and mortar fire. The JSSs would require significant reinforcement from sandbags, Hesco barriers, and bulletproof glass for observation posts. As for the police, they were willing to try anything that would enable them to regain control of the city and stop being targets for the insurgents. The Iraqi army was another matter entirely. They had recently been given control of large portions of the city and were sensitive to any intimation they were not providing adequate security. They only

wanted us to come into their designated areas to support one of their operations. Entering their areas at any other time left them with the impression we did not trust what they were doing.

The campaign to sell Operation Alljah began with our own chain of command. We initially experienced considerable resistance from our regimental headquarters because of the amount of support required, though it was mostly from staff members. Once we had convinced the regimental commander, Colonel Simcock, that the plan could work, he essentially overrode their concerns and told them to figure it out. He knew Fallujah was a big problem and something needed to be done, and done quickly. Between his support and my threat to take a caravan of trucks around Camp Fallujah and our own base, Camp Baharia (just off the northwest corner of Camp Fallujah), to collect every Jersey barrier I could lay my hands on for use in the city, the regimental logistics officer gave up his objections.

The next step was the first general officer in our chain of command, Brig. Gen. Mark Gurganus. I had been his regimental operations officer for nine months (six of those in Iraq) before he gave up command on my previous deployment. We understood each other, and he trusted my judgment. I would never say he was an easy sell, as he asked difficult and pointed questions, but every adjustment he made to the plan made sense, and when he agreed to it he provided his full support. The last stop was the Marine commanding general for all of Al-Anbar Province, Maj. Gen. Walt Gaskins. He was tremendously busy trying to manage the entire province but he took the time to sit down with us in early May. He liked what he heard and agreed to let us conduct the operation starting at the end of May. We now had the support and approval of our chain of command, so it was time to talk to the Iraqis.

We were hesitant to talk with them about the plan until our chain of command had approved it because we did not want to brief them on something and then have the rug pulled out from under us. We wanted to go to the Iraqis with a plan already approved. Once we had gotten the chain of command’s buy-in, our first stop was to talk to Chief Faisal. He was a dynamic leader who always wanted to go after the insurgents. From the start of our time together, he was always asking for us to support his raids. He would mount up every police officer he could find, in every vehicle they could coax into working, and would then set off after a target based on the

loosest of intelligence. He always wanted to be seen doing something. Since he had so much energy, selling him on the Alljah plan was not that difficult. The only difficult part was restraining him and asking him to be patient as we set everything up to conduct the operation, and then to go about it systematically instead of all at once.

Our next stop was to talk to Brigadier General Ali of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, Iraqi army. In trying to figure out how we could sell him on the plan, we came up with the idea that Alljah was the next logical step in the progression of restoring peace and security to Fallujah. Military forces did not belong in the cities, we argued; they belonged on the borders defending the nation, or in their bases training to defend the nation. Marine and Army forces supported by the Iraqi army had established control over Fallujah. The police were re-established next, then the Iraqi army received its own battle space within the city. What had to happen next was for the Iraqi army to transition control of their battle space to the police, who represented the final solution in Fallujah. One could only consider Fallujah "back to normal" if all military forces had left the city and the police were strong enough to maintain law and order. We proposed Operation Alljah as the way to get to that final step. Brigadier General Ali was a smart, dedicated professional who quickly saw the sense of what we were proposing. He was concerned about turning his battle space over to the police because he did not trust them, but he understood its necessity and agreed to support the plan with every means at his disposal.

Once we had everyone in agreement, the next issue was where to start. Faisal as usual wanted to take on one of the toughest neighborhoods (Jolan or Shuhada) first, but we were able to convince him that starting in one of the quieter neighborhoods, such as Khadairy, represented a better option. It was located in the city's northeastern part and had been fairly quiet up until this point. The other two precincts had sinister reputations that were well-deserved. By starting in a quieter area, we knew we would get a reaction from the insurgents, but it would be one we could handle and subdue. We could then make quick progress on restoring a semblance of security and some quality of life in that neighborhood so that it could serve as an example to other neighborhoods. If we had to engage in serious fighting, the violence and further battle damage would discourage other neighborhoods and jeopardize our ability to win the support of the locals.

Once Colonel Faisal finally agreed, we conducted detailed planning sessions involving all three forces (police, army, and Marines) along with a rehearsal on an enormous map of Fallujah where the leaders of every element walked and talked through their plan in front of everyone else. It was a tedious and time-consuming process to translate everything, but it gained everyone's buy-in and understanding of the plan. We also conducted reconnaissance patrols in the designated neighborhood looking for a likely building to use as a JSS. We inspected numerous buildings, some only as red herrings to keep the insurgents guessing. Once we settled on a building, we kept it quiet to ensure that there would be no "surprises." One insurgent tactic was to go into any building we had used and plant sufficient explosives to drop the entire house. They would then wait for us to use it again so they could kill everyone who entered the building. Needless to say, this was one pattern we strove hard to avoid.

We had scheduled the operation to start at the end of May 2007, but we were pre-empted by enemy activity. There was a funeral being conducted on May 24 in the southwest portion of the city for a leader from the Jumayli tribe just to the north of the city who had openly supported Coalition Forces. Al-Qaeda assassins had gunned him down in his restaurant in Fallujah. Apparently, killing him was not enough for al-Qaeda; they had to add insult to injury. The leader had been popular, so the funeral procession was well-attended by men, women, and children alike. Al-Qaeda targeted the procession with a suicide vehicle bomb, and the destruction was simply horrendous. We came upon the site shortly after the attack, and it was truly shocking. We had all seen carnage before, but this was much worse than usual. Body parts were scattered about the area, and there were large pools of blood and gore all over the street. It was impossible to tell how many had been killed or injured because of the typical Iraqi reaction to such an event. Their approach often was to drive up in their car, pull any casualties they found into the car, and transport them to the hospital immediately. There was no attempt to triage anyone or to treat them with immediate first aid. It was just a grab-and-go operation. By the time we arrived, this was well under way and there was not much we could do to help. There were still large numbers of people milling about exclaiming loudly and wailing, but it was also strangely subdued. They had also seen plenty of this sort of carnage, and though one could never call it routine, it certainly was a fact of

life for them. The Iraqi army and police were on the scene and in the process of restoring order, and a fire truck had been brought in to hose down the streets. Within a couple of hours, there was hardly any indication of what had happened except for the scorch marks and crater in the asphalt where the vehicle had exploded.

Probably the most amazing thing we ever witnessed in Fallujah happened as a result of this heinous attack. Mayor Saad decided to take action and brought the police along with him. He declared that no civilian vehicles would be allowed to drive into the city from that point on. When we heard about the proclamation, we could not believe he would take such a drastic measure. We also could not believe the people would tolerate it either. This was late May, and the heat was already intense and was going to get worse. His plan called for the Iraqis to park their vehicles outside the city if they were trying to enter it and then walk to their homes through the entry control points. Many of the women wore the full-length black burqas that had to be an oven just to wear, let alone to walk a couple of miles in. The people also had to carry anything they had brought with them as an added burden. In our mind, conditioned to think about how Americans would react, we could not see it actually being enforced in the face of what we anticipated would be civilian anger.

Instead of trying to help the police enforce what we thought was an unenforceable order, we stood back and waited to see if they would enforce it themselves—and they certainly did. It was amazing to watch how the streets emptied. There were some recalcitrant drivers who defied the ban, but the method used by the police to enforce the ban was to fire in the car’s direction to get the driver’s attention and to make the driver park it and walk. This made the first few days of the ban nerve-wracking as rounds were flying everywhere, but this died down fairly quickly and none of our Marines or sailors were hurt. I am not sure if any Iraqi civilians were hurt or not. The mayor eased the restriction to allow delivery trucks into the city after the start of Operation Alljah, but the ban stuck until late summer, when the police started to register vehicles waiting to enter the city. Once they were registered and had a placard mounted on their dashboard, they could enter.

As all of this was occurring, the final preparations for the conduct of the first swarm wrapped up. The materials were staged for quick transport into

the city. Plans were briefed and thoroughly rehearsed. On the day before we launched the operation, the mayor and Chief Faisal announced the start of Operation Alljah to the “sheiks council” and told them it would provide security to the city just as it was in Ramadi. The Fallujans had heard what was going on in the provincial capital, and we wanted to assure them that we were not launching another Operation Al Fajr. Doing this was risky, but we also had to assume that once we brought the Iraqi security forces into the process, the enemy would know about the plans as well. But that represented the price of gaining the confidence and support of the people and the Iraqi security forces. Keeping them out demonstrated a lack of trust, which would have been an insurmountable obstacle. We needed them for every aspect of the operation. Besides, we could go anywhere we wanted in the city, and there was not much the enemy could do about it. Everything was set and all of us were on pins and needles in anticipation of how it would all work out. It was a risky undertaking because of how exposed we would all be in each of the precincts we established, but there was no turning back. Something had to be done in Fallujah, and Operation Alljah was our bid for success.

|| Chapter 7 ||

The Fallujah Awakening

I believe that government starts at the bottom and moves upward, for government exists for the welfare of the masses of the nation.

Ramon Magsaysay, Philippine president who successfully defeated the Huk communist insurgency in the Philippines in the 1950s (www.rmaf.org.ph/)

As the Ottoman Empire broke apart in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and after World War I finished it off, occupying British forces assigned political agents to various parts of Iraq in order to extend their rule from Baghdad. The agent they assigned to Al-Anbar was Gerard Leachman, a veteran of the Boer War and numerous conflicts on the frontier of India against Pashtun tribesmen and the great hero of the Siege of Al Kut, where he had led the only successful breakout of British forces from Turkish encirclement. He was a hard man and had incorporated the ethos of the Indian frontier, in which tribes were punished for raids into the settled areas as part of the British government's closed border policy. For a brief while, even Theodore Roosevelt's son Kermit worked with Leachman as he imposed British rule on the tribes along the Euphrates. Kermit Roosevelt would eventually write about these experiences in his book *War in the Garden of Eden*. Leachman was eventually killed by a Zobai tribesman on August 12, 1920, in a small building halfway between Fallujah and Baghdad. He was shot in the back

by the son of the tribe's leader, the ancestor of Dr. Harith al-Dari, the current leader of the Zobai tribe, as he was exiting the building. His murder launched a tribal uprising against British rule in Iraq and eventually led to the Cairo Conference of 1921 that installed King Faisal, of Lawrence of Arabia fame and one of the three sons of Sherif Hussein of Mecca, as king of Iraq. The British eventually drew down their forces in Iraq but maintained a series of airfields in the country to help the new Iraqi state enforce its rule on the tribes. One of their chief air bases was in Habbaniyah in Al-Anbar Province just west of Fallujah, and a series of crumbling British forts persists to this day in the region. One of the provisions of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1921, which was the negotiated withdrawal of British forces from Iraq, was the arrest of Harith al-Dari, the leader of the Zobai, and his son for the murder of Gerard Leachman. To this day, the Zobai tribe considers itself one of the leading tribes of modern-day Iraq because of its role in removing the British, and it acted as such in post-2003 invasion of Iraq. Saddam Hussein eventually funded a film about the murder of Leachman, and today a small memorial commemorating the event is in Zobai tribal territory east of Fallujah.

For the next two decades things were relatively quiet in Al-Anbar Province, but in April 1941, the Iraqi military deposed King Faisal II, who fled to Jordan and to the protection of his grandfather's brother, King Abdullah. Following a joint operation of the Arab Legion of Jordan and British forces, the king was eventually reinstalled on the throne. As the British and Jordanians pushed eastward into Iraq, the Iraqi army burst a dam on the Euphrates, causing the Fallujah area to be flooded and become impassable. Former British officer and then head of the Arab Legion General John Bagot Glubb took his men north after crossing further up the river to cut off reinforcements to Baghdad from Mosul and in doing so intercepted several Iraqi forces. Fearing that the British were encircling them and after receiving none of the aid promised them by their Nazi German advisers, the coup plotters fled Baghdad and the monarchy was restored. Following a final military coup in 1958 that permanently removed the monarchy, the Fallujah area began to see many of the benefits of the oil-based economy that was developing in Iraq. The highway system was built throughout the country, and while it bypassed Fallujah, the city itself gained many industrial projects as part of an oil-enriched development strategy for

the country. Furthermore, the city's sewage, water, and electricity were developed during this time, and concrete homes increasingly became the norm as adobe structures and camel hair tents disappeared and a middle class began to form. Additionally, as the Baath Party grew and Saddam Hussein came to power in the late 1970s, increasingly large numbers of Fallujah's residents joined his security services as a means of employment and as a way of maintaining Sunni supremacy in a predominantly Shia country. Many of these same men would join the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police as well as the Republican Guard and form the nucleus of the nationalist insurgent groups operating west of Baghdad. They were now, as unusual as it may seem, our conditional allies against al-Qaeda in Iraq.

As the Anbar Awakening tribal movement against al-Qaeda rolled eastward in 2006–2007, the stirrings of a tribal revolt began to take shape in the Fallujah area. The powerful Albu Issa tribe, led by its paramount sheik Khamis al-Hasnawi, had already turned against al-Qaeda, or the *takfiri* as they were called, and was rallying the subsheiks of the twelve subtribes that constituted the Albu Issa tribal confederation to his personal banner. An excellent account of the early stages of this process is Bill Ardolino's 2013 Naval Institute Press book *Fallujah Awakens: Marines, Sheikhs, and the Battle against al-Qaeda*. The Albu Issa were one of the four main tribes in the Fallujah area that had historically controlled the politics and commerce of the region. The other major tribes were the Jumayli to the north and east of the city, the Mohammedi to the north and west, and the powerful Zobai tribe to the south and east. The Albu Issa's power base was west of the city along the Fallujah peninsula, which was an approximately eighty-square-kilometer area of farmland and irrigation canals set against the desert. It was a large green swath of land fueled and defended by the Euphrates River. With the desert to their west and the river to their east and their ability to control access to Fallujah for caravans traveling from the west, the Albu Issa were able to establish a defensible base from which its members projected power. Because they were *the* all-powerful tribe in the area, any government or external power that sought to govern the Fallujah area had to eventually make its peace with the tribe or suffer the consequences. It was with great expectation that I joined the Marines on a trip to this historic tribe to gain a better understanding of the tribal dynamics of the area following my deep immersion in Fallujah's city politics.

On May 2, I joined Colonel Simcock and his Regimental Combat Team staff as they visited the Albu Issa tribal area and the personal home of Sheik Khamis. We left in the early evening and the balmy air sat on the city as our convoy of Humvees drove through the center of town. The residents of Fallujah were finishing their chores for the day before the city's curfew went into effect, but most were absent since they tended to avoid our convoys because of fear of insurgent attacks. We traveled west toward the Euphrates River, cutting through the center of town along Highway 10, the main road bisecting the city, and although the electrical grid was functional to a degree, power was sporadic at best and apparently wasn't working at this time. The main buildings along the road were dark and menacing as our group crept along the major thoroughfare. We then traveled over one of the two bridges crossing the river, this one being reserved for military traffic, and as quickly as we passed through the city, we nestled into the verdant alluvial plain of the Euphrates River. The transition was stark as I looked out the window of the Humvee and saw the gray structures of the city of Fallujah on my left and the green reeds of the riverbank on the right. To the north of the bridge stood the pedestrian bridge used for traffic into the city and the site of the horrific hanging of the bodies of several security contractors ambushed in Fallujah in 2004, an incident that led to the two famous battles to retake the city. We stopped for several minutes at a small forward operating base supporting ECP 5 to pick up Lt. Col. Jim McGrath, who was in charge of the area, as well as some of his staff. The Fallujah city hospital stood not too far from the base to the north near the other bridge. After collecting our new passengers, we set out for Khamis's home, traveling down a paved road paralleling the green swath of Albu Issa land. We took a left and plunged into a shrouded world of palm trees, canals, dark undergrowth, and the arcana of farm life.

A thick copse of trees sheltered the convoy from the retiring sun, and the feeling of humidity and the dank smell of rotting vegetation signaled our entrance to a different world. Modest homes dotted the way, and small boys tended cows and sheep as they meandered along the fields. As we got closer I noticed the first of several checkpoints manned by Albu Issa tribesmen. They were dressed in casual wear sitting on the ubiquitous plastic chairs of Iraq and cradled their AK-47s on their laps. They were talking easily and sharing a laugh as they watched us drive by. Several palm

tree trunks had been rolled back from the road to let us by, a crude but simple method of stopping vehicle traffic, and we soon arrived at Sheik Khamis' home. As we approached his compound, a small mosque greeted us with an impressive single minaret piercing the vegetable canopy, which I soon learned was the personal mosque of the paramount sheik. He had also constructed it for the benefit of his tribe, which, practically speaking, was his family as well. As our group approached the home the security became tighter. Albu Issa tribesmen with AK-47s wandered the area dressed in comfortable multicolored, collared shirts and pants. A small white truck to our left had a large-caliber machine gun on a support manned by two tribesmen, while another tribesman smiled welcomingly to us as his feet dangled off a concrete bunker the Marines must have deposited there at some time. As we passed through the gate and into the open yard, we were greeted by a small oasis. A large courtyard of neatly maintained grass filled the square as bushes of roses and other flowers ringed its exterior. A small fountain centered the yard and a ring of white plastic chairs circled the fountain.

We grounded our personal protective gear and set up a weapons watch, and Simcock, McGrath, and other Marine leaders as well as several of Fallujah's leaders, including Police Chief Faisal, approached the seated Sheik Khamis and his fellow tribesmen. Khamis stood as they exchanged pleasantries, and various guards from both sides hovered nearby. One tribesman followed the group and filmed the greetings, which would provide useful proof of the tribe's evident influence in Fallujah. I watched the tribal leaders carefully, looking at how they interacted, their dress, and their mannerisms, trying to determine patterns. Khamis was a lanky and thin octogenarian who was dressed in a baby blue headdress that framed the dark sunglasses he regularly wore. He was the paramount sheik of a tribe that likely numbered in the tens of thousands, so it was as much a political position as a family one, and it was regarded with great respect by his tribal members, other tribes, and government officials. Khamis had slowly rallied his tribe behind the walls of his family compound by the time-honored practice of tribal diplomacy, cajoling, and, where necessary, shows of force. Today's meeting was as much a display of power as a social event. Once greetings had been exchanged, we retired to the sheik's home, a compound resplendent with marble floors, gold-trimmed lighting fixtures, and, to our

American eyes, somewhat garish furniture that was overly plush and of gigantic proportions.

As we passed by thick wooden doors I saw several more weapons leaning against the wall. If the insurgents got this far they were definitely going to be in for a fight. We entered a large reception room, and chairs lined the walls of the rectangular space. More plastic chairs were brought in for the additional guests, which now numbered around sixty. Simcock, McGrath, and Sheik Khamis sat at the front of the room while Iraqi officials and tribesmen lined one wall and the Marines and I sat across from them on the other side of the room. Servants quickly brought out hot tea and snacks as we started to talk business. The general purpose of our visit was to continue the positive working relationship we had with the Albu Issa and to ask Khamis to designate a member of his tribe as the main point of contact for the Marines when it came to civil affairs and development projects in their area. An additional goal was to discuss upcoming training cycles for Provincial Security Forces (PSF) personnel. These newly trained PSFs would then operate checkpoints in their tribal areas to push al-Qaeda away from population centers as well as have the forces available to fight them.

As the meeting began, a sense of urgency permeated the room as Sheik Khamis' nephew, Sheik Aifan Saddun, led the meeting. Aifan was a most unusual person in that he spoke fluent English and had spent many years abroad, which provided him a distinct perspective on events in Iraq. He had run a construction company overseas, and as security head of the Albu Issa he was charged with implementing its selection of tribesmen for security training, their placement and sustainment as part of the tribe's security strategy, and for overall security planning for the tribe. He projected a jaunty confidence, and while he frequently dressed like a Westerner, he was bedecked in the white robes of a tribal official this evening. As Aifan spoke to the assembled Albu Issa tribal members, Sheik Khamis took slow drags on a cigarette that was perched daintily from his fingertips. His strong presence and quiet dignity filled the room, and it was clear that Aifan Saddun spoke with Sheik Khamis's full support.

Sheik Khamis opened the discussion by telling the Marines that he had been in touch with the leaders of the Mohammedi and Jumayli tribes, respectively Sheik Hikmat and Sheik Meshan, who were living in Jordan and Syria respectively, and that both men were inclined to return to Anbar

to rally their tribes against al-Qaeda in the northern and western areas of Fallujah. He then requested the assistance of the Marines to facilitate a trip for his nephew Aifan to accompany the Marines, specifically Brig. Gen. John Allen, who was in charge of tribal engagements for Al-Anbar Province, to meet with both men in Amman, Jordan, to discuss the possibility of Coalition support for their security and transportation. He further stressed that this trip needed to occur soon (there was some discussion of having the trip take place within a week or so). He then designated Aifan as his point of contact for civil affairs and development, which essentially unified into one person the whole development and security portfolios for the Albu Issa tribal family. It was clear that Sheik Khamis was further reinforcing the general sense we had that he was preparing Sheik Aifan Saddun to be his successor if he were killed or passed away. The fact that Aifan had also been selected to travel to Jordan to entice additional tribal leaders home to Iraq underscored his newfound ascendency. Additionally, having Aifan Saddun speak to these men as an equal further bolstered his position in the tribal politics of the Fallujah area.

Another purpose of the meeting was to bolster the status of Sheik Khamis and Aifan Saddun within their own tribe, because even though Khamis was the titular head of the tribe he still had to cajole other subtribal sheiks to his perspective. There was a version of tribal democracy that even he had to follow, so the process of simultaneously convincing as much as pressuring these other tribal leaders to support him was the overarching purpose of the theatricality of today's meeting. The Marines and I were as much props for this display of power and influence as anything else. The targets of today's meeting, though, were Sheik Abudallah Shuwash (Albu Saleh subtribe) and Sheik Daham Tawfuq Awda (Albu Hatim subtribe), who were considered neutral in terms of support for Coalition Forces as well as actions against al-Qaeda in their areas. Both men were reluctant to join efforts against al-Qaeda in Iraq, with one citing his lack of weapons for his men. Their body language also indicated a less than enthusiastic view of Aifan's proposal that they work with the Marines. We would work to change their minds.

At this point, another prominent attendee, Major General Ghadim Feris, the founder of the Saddam Fedayan and Iraqi hero of the invasion of Kuwait and presently Ministry of Defense tribal adviser to the 1st Iraqi

army division, said that the increased security in Ramadi, and in Anbar in general, came about as a result of increasing tribal support. He implored the sheiks to “school” their people so they could stand as fighters and stressed that this needed to occur in an ethical and legal manner and that efforts should be coordinated with both Iraqi security forces and the Marines. He shared the story of the tribal uprising in Julaybah in response to a local woman’s son being kidnapped by al-Qaeda and how the tribesmen responded to her plea for help by wiping out al-Qaeda from their area. He finished his speech by saying that he was there to support the sheiks. No one interrupted the general during his speech, and his seating placement next to Sheik Khamis reinforced his influence with the Issa subsheiks. Aifan Saddun was adamant that if the tribes attacked al-Qaeda, the Marines would support them with weapons, ammunition, and logistical help. (As a side note, it was generally acknowledged that once a tribe began a fight, this obligated the tribe to finish it. This served as an insurance card if the tribe attempted to side with al-Qaeda again. This blood debt brought security to the area since there was no going back to al-Qaeda once you had crossed it.) Police Chief Faisal then rose as representative of Fallujah’s police force and delivered a similar speech. He also called on the tribesmen to support the Iraqi police and said that a strong Provincial Security Force of Albu Issa tribesmen would alleviate some pressure in the city. This led to a group discussion regarding additional support. Several in attendance brought up the fact that the Iraqi army had many captured weapons in storage that needed to be turned over to the Marines for reissue to the tribal forces. Aifan echoed this sentiment and said that tribal support for the Iraqi police was a must and listed three key areas in eastern Anbar where this support was needed: Albu Issa, Karmah, and Saqlawiyah. He also said that he would like to open several Iraqi police stations in the Albu Issa area. The two Albu Issa subsheiks must have been impressed by the totality of the pressure as well as the opportunity that had been presented to them; time would tell, but I was optimistic.

It was a revelation to witness “tribal engagement” in practice, and the practical aspects of power needed to move tribal members from being fence sitters against al-Qaeda to actively embracing a strategy of repulsing them. The requirements for success in the rural areas—of enlisting village members in their own defense, the tribes in this case, in a manner that froze

out the insurgency from their communities—was not yet our strategy in the city of Fallujah. What was most intriguing to me was the intratribal as well as the intertribal politics of Sheik Aifan Saddun's tribal outreach efforts. To a great extent, it appeared to be driven by encroachments of Sheik Sattar's "Anbar Awakening" group to the east of Habbaniyah into the Fallujah area. If Aifan was able to reinforce his position within his own tribe of the Albu Issa, reach out to two legitimate tribal chiefs, and build bridges with other local leaders, including Coalition Forces, his actions could form a political/security block of support for him to reach beyond Fallujah, or at least establish him as a power to be reckoned with in the Fallujah area. Aifan did not have a favorable view of Sheik Sattar, regarding him in a tribal sense as a subsheik reaching beyond his social position, and he probably viewed any expansion of his forces into the Fallujah area as a challenge to legitimate tribal authority and, perhaps more important, to his own future ambitions.

|| Chapter 8 ||

The City Awakens

The only way to defeat guerillas is with better guerillas, not by the methods of regular warfare.
John Bagot Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion*, 1948

The overarching goal of my efforts in Fallujah was to build a viable local government that was representative, competent, and responsive to the needs of the people. With Sheik Hamid in charge of the city council, Saad focused on building the mayor's office, and Chief Faisal laboring to improve security, we seemed to have the right sort of leadership needed to turn the city around. Sheik Bakr's Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council was clearly a nuisance and possibly a threat, and political assassination continued to be a real concern as the insurgents sought to undermine local government. The political tasks, as I saw, it were to continue to support the mayor as he slowly built his authority in the city, knit together the tribal sheiks around Fallujah into the city government where feasible, and bring the various parts of the local government such as the municipal departments, police, and neighborhood *muktars* to the city council meetings. If I could get all the pieces and parts of the local government meeting at least once a week it would promote accountability. The insurgents' strategy was to disrupt and discredit the local government and make it completely dysfunctional through assassinations, the building

of rival organizations, and creation of an atmosphere of instability. The Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council seemed to be the main vehicle through which the insurgency exercised its political strategy, while its armed element battled the police, the Iraqi army, and the Marines. We had to fight the insurgency holistically and think of good governance as a tool against the insurgency rather than something we helped with because we were good people.

The first step in helping the mayor was improving his personal security. His office was precariously placed in Fallujah directly next to the main gate to the Government Center and was overshadowed by a series of taller buildings that provided the insurgents with plenty of opportunities to attack it. Because of some of the reporting I had made about the mayor's security difficulties, in less than ten days the Marines elevated the mayor's personal safety to a top priority. They moved in a series of twenty-foot concrete T-walls to surround the mayor's office and sandbagged the main windows facing the road into Fallujah that passed by his office. While the gray concrete and green plastic sandbags created the feeling of a sepulcher in the building, it was clear that the mayor felt much better about his situation and seemed more confident about his position. The Marine Civil Affairs team for the city and I met with him on May 5 at his office to hear about his latest plans and to identify opportunities where we could assist him further. He had just returned from a trip to the provincial capital of Ramadi, where he had had a half-hour meeting with Governor Mamoun of Anbar. He told us the governor had praised the mayor for his performance and told him that the provincial government would help him with anything he needed. Nothing else seemed to have come from the mayor's trip, but it was a good start. The mayor said he was pleased with the security improvements to the city council building and looked forward to future security enhancements that were scheduled for the next week. He also mentioned his frustration that so much of the city council's business had been taken up with security for the council's members versus talking about the relevant issues of the city such as expanding basic services. To that end, the mayor agreed, at our urging, to have the city directors of municipalities and electricity attend next Tuesday's council meeting to present an overview of their activities and be available for questioning. We agreed to meet with the directors to encourage their attendance. The mayor also said that all contracts with the

city's departments in the future would go through his office. He was clearly concerned about corruption, but he also wanted to ensure that he had a better sense of the activities of his own city government. With respect to the past Tuesday's city council meeting, the mayor felt that it was not well-organized, that its members talked too much about security issues, and that he welcomed Police Chief Faisal's bold statement about who was possibly behind the assassination of Sheik Sami. The mayor said that Chief Faisal must have had strong evidence of the killing because he would not have generally made such a firm public declaration. It was another productive meeting with the mayor, and my confidence in his abilities and sincerity were increasing.

As with most things when fighting an insurgency, the enemy also has a vote. At the May 11 weekly governance meeting held at Regimental Combat Team 6, Colonel Simcock announced that another member of Fallujah's city council had been assassinated. His name was Hikmat, and he was a high school gym teacher who was gunned down in his home by four gunmen with AK-47s. He represented the city's teachers, and while he didn't stand out in my mind from among the numerous council members, his death was yet another symbol of how ruthless the insurgency still was in Fallujah. Perhaps because he had been a high school teacher, a position at once recognizable for any U.S. soldier and symbolic of our lives back home, I had a dream about his death that evening and woke with a start the next morning, gasping for breath. But Hikmat's death set off a series of actions the cumulative effects of which changed the city for good.

The city council held its weekly meeting four days later, and, as before, the effects of the killings were dramatic, although this time it also affected the mayor. Much like before, none of the city council's members attended the meeting, but the mayor was there as well as Chief Faisal and Sheik Hamid, the head of the city council. We met separately with the mayor in his office

since none of the city council's members were there. The Marines asked the mayor if he would participate in a weekly security meeting with the Iraqi police and army to discuss security matters, freeing up the city council to discuss reconstruction, development, and basic services. The mayor readily agreed to this proposal, and it was suggested that the meeting should be held after the city council met. The mayor said that a regular security meeting was a good idea so long as it was active and its participants cooperated. The mayor suggested that the meeting place for the security meeting should be different from where the city council met. The mayor had received intelligence warnings that the Government Center was under threat of mortar attack, and he said that the insurgents were aware that the city council meetings took place on Tuesdays and that a "lot of Americans" tended to show up at them.

The mayor then turned the conversation to a discussion of security in the city. The mayor asked for a "green light" from Coalition Forces to commence an operation to clear the neighborhoods of Fallujah from insurgents and then use the *muktars* to secure their areas and take responsibility for security. The mayor had asked the *muktars* to perform a census of their respective neighborhoods to better know who was not from their community. The mayor then said he wanted to impose a curfew on the neighborhood, prevent traffic flow into and out of the area for a month, and then systematically clear the area. His plans were remarkably similar to those the Marines were developing. He said that shuttle buses would be available to the residents of the area so they could go to work and do personal business. He was specifically interested in the neighborhoods of Hey Nazal, Al Jabail, and Al Shuhada. It was encouraging to see the mayor focused on providing security to his people, and his own plans of clearing the city, empowering local leaders, and physically shaping the battle space to limit the insurgent car bomb threat were laudable and dovetailed nicely with what the Marines were then undertaking. Over the many years of the war in Iraq, we had finally found a local ally to work with against al-Qaeda who was not only determined and well organized but had the support of the people.

On May 19, the mayor held his first meeting with the city's *muktars*. Chief Faisal was there as well as Chairman Sheik Hamid and about thirty-five *muktars*, as well as a few members of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council. In a stroke of good luck the head of the "sheiks council," Abu Bakr, had departed for Syria for some ill-defined medical treatment. His departure was a boon to the city, and I figured he likely left due to the heavy interest of the police into his alleged involvement in the killings of the two city council members. It was a time of intrigue, and perhaps the *muktars* meeting indicated that the mayor was taking advantage of Bakr's departure. The *muktars* were led by a man named Hamid Hussein Zaidon. He wore thick 1980s-style glasses, had a gray and black goatee, and dressed in the robes of a tribal sheik. His voice was gravelly, he was short in stature, and he had a thin frame although he was energetic and keen to play a larger role in Fallujah's politics. The mayor had called the meeting at the city council's chambers, and he was passionate about the need for a new direction for the city. He spoke directly to the assembled men about his need for their help and how he couldn't govern the city without them. He implored them to participate and play an active role in a new security plan poised to change Fallujah. He told them they were the "mini-mayors" of their neighborhoods and that if they did their jobs well, the people would finally have the security they deserved. He then said that if they did not do their jobs he would remove them. Sheik Zaidon bristled at the suggestion that the mayor would or even could remove the *muktars* from their positions of authority. The mayor responded by saying that the time of allowing bad leadership to continue was behind them and the people needed the *muktars* as well as the city's leaders to do their jobs and to do them well. The mayor then adjourned the meeting and conducted interviews with several members of the Iraqi press. He spoke confidently, and the image of the mayor determined to secure the city was powerful, especially since he had a pistol holster dangling from his shoulders. It seemed like things were starting to change as the people of Iraq took charge of their own security. It was going to be a new beginning.

Then there was a wrinkle in our plans. On May 22, the city council held its weekly meeting, and the chairman, Sheik Hamid, opened by saying that the mayor was incredibly frustrated with his position and felt he was not getting the kind of support he needed to perform his job. At this point, I absented myself from the meeting and made my way to the mayor's office. He was sitting at his desk working on some paperwork. I asked him what his concerns were and how he was doing. He said that he was more than happy to exercise the responsibilities of his position, even though he and his family regularly received death threats because of it, but he was frustrated that he had none of the rights of a mayor. He specifically mentioned that because he did not have a city budget, he had to personally borrow approximately 7 million Iraqi dinars to pay salaries and other expenses that he had incurred as mayor. The mayor said that his situation was simply "incredible" because "he expected the government to fund him" and he now found himself "funding the government." The mayor was particularly upset because residents of Fallujah, especially the poor, were constantly coming to his office for assistance and he was unable to help them due to a lack of resources. The mayor also expressed his frustration that because he was unable to leave his compound because he did not have his own vehicles and the Fallujah city government building was in such a state of disrepair, he was severely limited in his ability to effectively perform his duties. The mayor said he had gone to Ramadi the previous day to speak with Governor Mamoun about procuring a budget for the city but the governor said he had no money to spare. Following this rebuff, which may have been politically driven, the mayor said he was going to resign. The mayor specifically said that his only option to stay on as mayor was to work with the insurgents or become corrupt himself (much like the last mayor, he said), but that these were options he could not honorably accept and did not want. The mayor said the Americans paid someone $50,000 to "shit" and he got nothing even though he was doing a good and very dangerous job. I sympathized greatly with the mayor's predicament, and it was heartening to witness such a seemingly selfless public servant. It was such a contrast with most of Afghan officialdom I had previously worked alongside.

I asked the mayor whether other mayors of Anbar received budgets from the Anbar provincial government. He said he was not entirely sure but believed the other cities did not receive a budget. I told the mayor that while

I had only been in Fallujah a short while, many of my colleagues and I were very impressed with the mayor's leadership, maturity, and decision making. I went to on to say that we really valued his work and strongly hoped he would not resign. I also said that we had not been as supportive of the mayor as we should have been and that I would directly convey his concerns up my chain of command. I asked the mayor if he would be willing to hold off on resigning for at least one week in order to see what we (Coalition Forces and the Iraqi government) could do for him. I told him that if we were unable to help him, it was our shame for not having done more. I asked the mayor if he would be willing to meet with me at his office the next day to detail his specific needs. The mayor said that because of his respect for me he would hold off on resigning until next week and would meet with me to review his requirements.

My report that evening was direct and to the point.

> Lacking real, substantive, and timely support, the mayor of Fallujah will resign from office which will dramatically set back our governance and security efforts in the city. The mayor strongly feels that he does not get the kind of support he needs from the Iraqi Government and Coalition Forces to adequately perform his job. He has thus far paid for his mayoral expenses out of his own pocket (approximately 7 million Iraqi dinar) and simply cannot sustain this amount of spending due to obligations to his family. Because he does not have his own transportation and the City Government Center is in such disrepair, he is severely limited in his ability to do his job. The mayor stated that he has all the risks and responsibilities of mayor but none of the rights. If we do not either facilitate or effectively provide assistance, even on an interim basis, the mayor will resign. I have been able to convince the mayor to hold off from resigning for at least a week. I will be able to provide a more detailed list of his needs following my meeting with him tomorrow morning at his office.

I recommended the following course of action.

> I strongly recommend that an emergency trip be scheduled to Ramadi to meet with Governor Mamoun and the Provincial Council to demand, quite frankly, a budget for the city of Fallujah, or at least one for the mayor. I would also recommend that we use the opportunity of Ambassador Crocker's visit to bring up the issue of funding with him, both from the Provincial Government and the central government. As an interim measure, I'd suggest we explore the possibility of providing a monthly stipend for the mayor. I think it would be useful to provide the mayor with some civil affairs humanitarian assistance as well so that he can distribute these to people in need who visit him. I also strongly suggest that we procure an up-armored vehicle(s) for the mayor and perform the necessary repairs that the city council building requires.

I met with the mayor the next day to discuss his budgetary needs and to get a better understanding of his concerns both for himself and the city. In general, I found the mayor's demeanor calm and focused, and he spoke plainly and openly with me, at several points apologizing for his bluntness. His financial needs did not strike me as excessive, and they appeared to be sensible and in keeping with the responsibilities of his office. I believed that the mayor's tendency to threaten resignation, something we often took too lightly, was real and serious. To be fair, he should have been telling us his concerns well before the situation got to this point, and I told the mayor as much, but I thought if we responded forthrightly, with a quick and short-term infusion of cash, we could stave off this immediate crisis and plan a long-term strategy for normalizing his budgetary process. My general philosophy with respect to working with local nationals is "trust but verify." I had seen the mayor in several different forums and had been impressed with his actions and statements. I believed that any deficiencies in his behavior had more to do with a lack of background in being mayor than any malicious intent. I thought he was a generally honest man who was trying to do the right thing but lacked the tools necessary to accomplish the job. He sought to perform his duties out of a sense of responsibility even though he had few resources. He said to me that if he had strong support, he could bring security, reconstruction, and development to the city of Fallujah. He then said he had "a strong hope for the city and for Iraq."

The mayor expressed his frustration and his shame that he was unable to assist the people in need who requested help from him. He said he didn't want his personal reputation tarnished by his inability to respond to the expectations the people had of him as mayor. Several people came to his office with medical problems every day, expecting help because he was the mayor, and that he had to pay for their care out of his own pocket. The mayor felt obligated to do this, and because of his financial situation, he tried to avoid situations where he would feel required to help a person in need. He was worried about the unfulfilled hopes of the people and their expectation that he should be responding to them. Because of these hopes and expectations, the mayor said he would rather resign as mayor with his reputation intact than limp along as an ineffective public official. He said, "give me a chance, I will show them what I can do." He then reiterated his support for the agreed-upon security plan the 2nd Battalion 6th Marines had developed. Having said that, he said he still intended to bring in three hundred to four hundred men to supplement the security initiative and have them focus on the more dangerous areas of the city. He said these men had worked with him before and that he would like for them to stay at his office while they were here. He went on to say that the men would stay in Fallujah for many weeks and would clear all the most dangerous neighborhoods. He was reluctant to explain more of the plan to me, but he said he regarded it as "Top Secret." He went on to say that the people of Fallujah were ready to join the fight against al-Qaeda and that al-Qaeda fought for nothing.

While the process of getting the mayor resources would take a while, I was determined to see what I could do to help him along temporarily. My reporting certainly helped to highlight his predicament, but something needed to be done now. I spoke with the SEAL Team leadership and determined that I could provide the mayor with some foodstuffs to feed not only his men but any hard-luck cases that came his way. With their permission, I used money from our civil affairs fund and purchased $30,000 worth of food such as wheat, beans, rice, cooking oil, etc., that was organized into food bags. I then had my family send me two large boxes of office supplies from the United States to help the mayor with some of his administrative tasks. I then discovered that the task force had a lot of children's clothing and school supplies as well as soccer balls available for distribution (which is considered humanitarian assistance), and I gathered

them for the mayor too. I realize these seem to be small infusions of assistance, but to be seen doing something at this stage, no matter how small it might have been, was psychologically important for the mayor. I wanted him to know that we cared about and supported him. Within about a week I had all the foodstuffs and other assistance and gave it all to the mayor at the Fallujah Development Center outside the city. He was grateful to receive the aid, and it definitely strengthened our relationship. He always said he didn't believe in promises and believed in results. At one point he said to me that if he didn't see something in his hand he didn't believe it would happen; if the food also fed his fighters who would confront al-Qaeda, all the better.

I accompanied the Marines to the Government Center once again four days later, hoping to attend the weekly meeting of the "sheiks council" and *muktars*, but I ended up sitting down with Mayor Saad again, this time at the Fallujah police station. We met with him in Chief Faisal's office, and he arrived dressed in a light blue Iraqi police shirt with a shoulder holster. The mayor expressed his interest in forming a joint Iraqi/Coalition Forces committee to review the remaining Al Fajr payments that were recently authorized for the city (these were payments made to the residents of Fallujah if they had had property damaged during the 2004 battles for Fallujah). The mayor reiterated his concern that these payments would likely go to al-Qaeda and insurgent supporters if a reliable and accurate system of verification wasn't established to prevent incorrect payments. He also said he had ordered the city's bank not to pay out any funds for Al Fajr requests until this committee had been formed and was functioning. The mayor also said that he had retrieved a computer hard drive from the city's cement factory that contained all the city's deed information. The mayor hoped that this committee would vet each compensation request against existing city and Marine records to prevent corruption. We expressed our strong support for the idea of the committee and promised to bring it up with our own leadership. The mayor's energy and dedication were definitely impressive.

The mayor then explained the decision he and Chief Faisal had made to close all the city's entry control points (see chapter 6). He stressed that this was a necessary action to prevent vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices from entering or exiting the city and to reduce the threat of these types of explosives. He then said he had written and printed a document explaining the decision and had distributed it throughout the city. To reduce the travel burden on the residents of Fallujah, the mayor had organized a series of buses to transport people around the city and to its main gates. Residents would park their vehicles outside an ECP and then use the buses to enter Fallujah. Foot traffic was still allowed into and out of the city. The mayor also said that trucks with food, medical supplies, propane, etc., would be escorted by Iraqi police. The mayor then mentioned that cooperation between the people and Iraqi security forces had increased and that the locals were happy with the security measures because they understood they were part of a concerted effort to improve city-wide security. He then said that mosque loudspeakers were going to be used throughout the city to encourage people to join the Iraqi police. We then discussed a "neighborhood watch" program that would follow the "swarm" security plan the Marines had been working on. The mayor said that this was the first he had heard of support for the neighborhood watch but stated that as long as Chief Faisal was aware of it he had no problem with it. He then said that providing T-shirts, hats, a small monthly payment, identification cards, and the potential for future employment with the Iraqi police was a "golden idea." We then told the mayor that no solution had yet been found for providing the neighborhood watch participants with weapons. We told him that we hoped that twelve watch members would be mobilized for every Iraqi police member. The mayor also expressed his support of an idea to record a message condemning the recent suicide blast against a funeral procession (see chapter 6). He said he would be willing to record a message for the "swarm" at the next day's security brief at Camp Baharia.

The mayor went on to say that he had a network of informants throughout the city who were assisting the police. He said he would likely be out of regular communication with Marine personnel in the following days because he would be going undercover, possibly as a garbage peddler, to look for members of al-Qaeda and that he would acknowledge our

presence but asked that we not say “hi” to him so that his cover wouldn’t be blown. We then reviewed the assistance that had been prepared for the neighborhoods that would be swept clear of insurgents. The mayor expressed his support for the assistance and said the *muktars* would have the responsibility of determining where work would take place and who would do it. He said he would like to eventually be able to “dominate” the city with respect to security and requested our assistance in procuring security cameras for Fallujah. The mayor also mentioned that he would eventually like each city street illuminated to help with security. At our request, the mayor provided us with a list of Iraqi police targets for the “swarm.”

The mayor was upbeat and positive, even joking with us a bit, and was clearly deeply involved in the planning and execution of security operations in Fallujah. It was also encouraging that he planned to have an agenda prepared for Monday’s meeting with Governor Mamoun and was also involved in mobilizing the city in support of upcoming security operations. His support for using mosque loudspeakers to persuade residents to support and join the Iraqi police and for using city *muktars* as part of the security plan was laudable. It was encouraging that the Iraqi decision to close the ECPs to the city had been followed by planning to mitigate its negative effects on the population. The use of buses to transport people into and around the city was an excellent idea, and its implementation was a rough measure of the mayor’s ability to plan and implement complex initiatives. The fact that Mayor Saad and Chief Faisal also published a document explaining their security decisions to the residents of Fallujah was also encouraging in that they recognized the need to have the population behind them. Things were beginning to look up for the city and the momentum was swinging our way.

Here is the mayor’s letter to the people:

> *In the name of Allah, the most compassionate, the most merciful*
> *To the honored people of Fallujah*
>
> *May Allah’s mercy and peace be upon you all,*
> *Our cherished people:*

I am sending you greetings filled with love and appreciation asking Almighty God to protect the city's elders, women, children and youth from all evil and harm, and to save us from the evil doers who have made Fallujah a city of violence, terror and murder. Those killers do not distinguish between a civilian, a soldier and old men and women. I am asking you in the name of God; do not sabotage your city by your own hands once again. One might ask how someone could destroy his own city. I say to you, your silence toward anyone who seeks to harm the city is sabotage. Your silence toward a killer who kills a sheikh, a child, a policeman, and a soldier is sabotage.

As a result of the urgent conditions of your city, we encourage you to stand up as one man to weaken the odds and challenges. This in turn requires everyone to stand firm in serving this blessed city, particularly in the security arena. So, I am telling you that good things are forthcoming. Again, good things are coming. Thus, I am asking you take control of your city through volunteering in the army and police, as well as in the service sector of Fallujah city where seven thousand jobs have been made available for all according to their place of residency.

Important Notice:

1. It is mandatory for each family to select one person to enlist in either the army or the police.

2. This offer includes employment opportunities with attractive salaries, in the service sector.

3. Registration will be made available through each neighborhood counselor, paragraph (1, 2) indicating the full name, surname, education level, and date of birth as follows: DD/MM/YYYY.

4. Be aware to not pay any dues in exchange for your registration. You may register without an application, solely show interest.

In case there are any problems with the regulations, please contact the People's Complaint Hotline at XXXXX

Saad Awad Rashid
Mayor of Fallujah

With the first “swarm” about to begin in the northern Fallujah neighborhood of Khadairy, I attended an emergency meeting of Mayor Saad and Governor Mamoun on May 28 at the mayor’s office. The meeting had been hastily arranged because of my report on the mayor’s expressed desire to resign, but it was an encouraging sign of how important we took his role in the overall plan to finally pacify Fallujah’s insurgency. Governor Mamoun sat at the mayor’s desk while the mayor sat attentively on a nearby couch with a notebook and pen at the ready. He was wearing his usual civilian clothes this time and seemed prepared to take advantage of this opportunity. Mamoun was a portly former engineer with jet black hair and mustache and perpetually needed a shave. He was dressed in a coarse, dark brown suit and was clearly in his element. All the Marines’ leadership, including Brig. Gen. John Allen, Colonel Simcock, Lt. Col. Bill Mullen, and one of the U.S. State Department representatives, was there. It was a good showing and demonstrated to the mayor that his words and concerns had some influence.

The governor began the discussion by explaining that Fallujah was not a normal city and that it had long struggled with great internal and external challenges. The governor said he was trying to fix the problems and asked the mayor whether he had a good city council and a good police force. The mayor said he did but that he needed a “big supporter” to help him serve Fallujah. The governor said he could get anything the mayor needed from the Ministries of Interior or Defense in Baghdad. Mamoun said that he saw similar patterns in Ramadi and Fallujah as they both improved their security. The mayor also saw a similar pattern with respect to working to control each neighborhood of the city and to expand security throughout it. The mayor said he needed one month to clear the neighborhoods and bring security to the city. He mentioned that corruption was a problem in Fallujah, that he worked day and night for the city, and that his door was open to the citizens twenty-four hours a day. He went on to say that he

would relate any problems he had to the governor and they could address the problems together. Following this conversation, the governor asked the mayor what problems he was facing, and he inquired about why the entry control points into the city were closed, mentioning that several people had complained to him about it. The mayor replied that there had been several car bomb attacks recently and that the closing was a necessary security measure. The mayor said that he planned to secure Fallujah much like Ramadi did by going block by block, and he said he appreciated the governor's help with the Iraqi police. General Allen then stated that the Marines were working closely with the mayor and were actively supporting him.

The governor and the mayor went on to discuss Fallujah's health system, further assistance to the police force, and the progress local judges were making in their efforts to promote the rule of law in the city. It was an incredibly positive and constructive meeting, and things were certainly looking up for the city of Fallujah. The mayor was able to review most of his main concerns with the governor, and they both appeared to have similar views of governing by stressing accountability and results. While the true measure of the success of the meeting could only be measured by tangible results, it was encouraging that the governor wanted the mayor to visit with him every two weeks or so to discuss city business. Additionally, it was also a good sign that the mayor was prepared for the meeting, spoke confidently and forthrightly, and was willing to give an honest assessment of Fallujah's concerns as much as his own.

The next day I attended the final city council meeting before Operation Alljah was to commence. There was a sense of excitement in the meeting room as both Fallujah's residents and the Marines expected good things from the new security plan as much as from the city's dynamic leadership. Sheik Hamid opened the meeting as usual by commenting that the people of Fallujah were happy and positive about recent security initiatives in the city. He thanked the Iraqi police and Marines for their activities and said he and other members of the city council had had several meetings with local

residents and had received positive feedback about the closing of the entry control points into the city. He also said many of them had no problem walking for two hours in the heat in return for security. One member of the council joked that because there had been no killings recently the workers at the graveyard had been taking a break. Hamid encouraged the police and the Marines to maintain and sustain their operations and said they would have a positive effect on the city. He went on to say that if the efforts failed it would be a major setback for the city and chaos would ensue. Following these opening remarks, Mayor Saad discussed, in general terms, the security plan for Fallujah.

The mayor said that for the benefit of the city council he would give a concise overview of the security plan, which he said was a good opportunity for the residents of Fallujah to live safely. He praised the Marines for working with Iraqi security forces and for their sense of urgency in the matter. He said he was willing to extend the curfew as long as it continued to have positive security benefits for the city and that the municipal health department was prepared to help people in need while the curfew was in place. He also mentioned how he was sensitive to making sure that security operations did not negatively affect the examination time for students. Sheik Hamid Hussein Zaidon, the leader of the *muktars* council, then commented that most of the vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices in Fallujah came from outside the city and tended to concentrate in the industrial section of town. He stressed that it was important for the *muktars* to communicate with Fallujah's residents to identify the hot spots in the city and to convey this information to the proper authorities.

Chairman Hamid thanked Sheik Zaidon for his input and then talked about how the police had only two hands and would not be able to do their jobs without the help of the population. He encouraged the people to overcome their fear and help implement security for the city and asked the police to guard and protect the people who helped them. He also asked the police to continue their patrols during the day, since this was when most violence took place. He also asked them to help with life support in the city and to make sure supplies were getting into the city. Hamid then commented on how the buses in the city were helping ease the burden on the people of the closed ECPs, and he encouraged everyone to take care of

the families in the city and to make sure they got food. He said that the experience of Ramadi with respect to its turning around security was a good model for Fallujah. He concluded his comments by requesting that the mayor and the Iraqi police implement a plan that all of Fallujah's vehicles be registered with the city and have a vehicle tag and that all vehicles be assigned to a zone.

The mayor then turned the conversation to a discussion of the need for city *muktars* to help the police and the Marines by relaying information to them about where the bad guys were. The mayor then said he wanted to track who lived in the city and to identify those people who were not from the area. At this suggestion, the city council member representing the imams stated that this was not the job of the mayor. He said that this was the *muktars*' job and they needed to do the work of tracking down people and keeping tabs on who was from the area and who wasn't. They must also relay this information to the police and Coalition Forces. He said that this system would operate like systems in Syria and Jordan. Deputy Chair Kassim then mentioned that almost 90 percent of the bad guys in Fallujah come from Habbaniyah and Karmah. The Marines noted that most of the insurgents who were arrested or killed come from the city of Fallujah itself. Following this conversation, the mayor mentioned that there were too many bad guys in Fallujah and that the city's *muktars* had not been getting information to the mayor or the security services. He said that nothing had been done and that few *muktars* had been helpful. Sheik Hamid chimed in by saying that the *muktars* needed to sit down with the police and go over all the details of their respective neighborhoods and that any *muktar* who didn't should be replaced. He then said that he was there to serve the city, that he was sacrificing his family and living under the constant threat of kidnapping, and that it was unfair for others to do their jobs with these threats while others didn't. He said the Iraqi people should work as a team to fight and that they don't need people who aren't there to help. He then said there was no area between good and bad, and he encouraged the members to call the people to join the effort for good. Following this lengthy exchange, the head of the *muktars*, Sheik Zaidon, said that the *muktars* wanted to do their jobs but they needed security, weapons, and communications equipment. He said they were scared for their lives, that he was loyal to the city of Fallujah, and that if a *muktar* was not doing his job

he should be replaced. He said he had some good and not so good *muktars* who worked with him.

Fallujah's city government was starting to come alive. It had suffered through two assassinations and numerous threats, and the right leaders were working together to bring competent administration to the people. We had developed things with the city council to the point that regular meetings were taking place and the Iraqis were providing their own solutions to their problems. The mayor's bold security plan, along with the Marines' Operation Alljah, meant that security conditions in the city were going to change decisively and for the better. The mayor's confident leadership, even in the face of threats and a lack of resources, was heartening to witness and in some small ways renewed my faith in the possibility of changing things through positive leadership. All the pieces and parts for security and the local government were in place. It was now time to push al-Qaeda out for good.

One of the great ironies of the Iraq War was that even though so much money was being spent every day during the conflict, it still didn't get to the right places at the right times to the right people. Mayor Saad had repeatedly shown a willingness to lead the residents of Fallujah and put an end to al-Qaeda's murderous ways. Even with all the good work he had been doing, he still did not have a salary or any budget and was forced to rely upon a bank loan and good intentions to get things done. When his vehicle was destroyed by an improvised explosive device, he was without a means of getting around the city to see the people directly and inspect the activities of his municipal departments. Both the Marines and the Provincial Reconstruction Team were laboring to find a vehicle for him, but, as always during war, it was taking way too much time, and the grim reality existed that he might be killed without a sufficiently reinforced vehicle. It dawned on me that the SEALs had two up-armored SUVs in their parking lot that never left the wire and were only used to drive around base. They seemed to fit the mayor's requirements of being up-armored but civilian looking. I broached the subject with the Task Unit commander, and he agreed to

possibly lending a vehicle to the mayor as long as I could find a replacement. I then approached the Marines, who had plenty of unarmored trucks on base they could lend, and they agreed to provide us with a replacement. I worked with our judge advocate general (command lawyer) and drafted a contract for the Task Unit commander and the mayor to sign. I spoke with the mayor about the plan at the end of the city council meeting, and we both agreed to meet at the Fallujah Development Center east of town later in the afternoon. At around three o'clock the mayor showed up with his security detail, and after he signed the contract I presented him with the keys. I mentioned that he could use the vehicle for six months until his own government provided him with a car. He was incredibly grateful for the vehicle and thanked me profusely. There was only so much I could do as an individual to affect things in Fallujah, so it was nice to know that my meager efforts had an impact.

|| Chapter 9 ||

The Swarm and the Surge

"You cannot win militarily," Krulak said. "You have to win totally, or you are not winning at all."

Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 637

Sometimes, you just want to scream and yell but have to restrain yourself and let things work their way out. It was two o'clock in the morning on May 30, 2007, and we were launching our first swarm operation to begin Operation Alljah. My personal security detail (PSD) and I were on the northern edge of Fallujah trying to keep an eye on developments. Things were not going well. The patrol moving into the city to secure the Joint Security Station (JSS) for the Khadairy section was well behind schedule and now looked to be stuck in the city's back alleyways. We had worked out a route that was clear of low-hanging power wires that might snag our large, seven-ton trucks, but the patrol had taken a wrong turn and was no longer on the designated route. I was tracking them via the Blue Force Tracker (BFT) system on a monitor mounted just to the left of where I sat in my up-armored Humvee. I knew the patrol leader was doing his best to turn the patrol around, but I could envision the seven-ton trucks entangled in electrical wires they had snagged as they tried to navigate the tight roads. I was also monitoring the radio traffic from the patrol. My PSD

and I were waiting nearby in case the enemy attacked the patrol and we were needed.

To make matters worse, the convoy of trucks carrying the cement barriers to be placed throughout the Khadairy precinct was also stuck. They had staged on a road near where we were waiting, but one of the trucks had turned too closely to some cement barriers already emplaced and had shredded several of the tires on its trailer. The logistics Marines from Combat Logistics Battalion 6 were working frantically to get the trailer off the cement barrier and get the tires repaired so that they could move on. They were a great crew of Marines led by Lt. Col. Pat Kelleher. Pat had supported me when I was on my previous deployment, and he defined the word support. If it were even close to being within the capabilities of the unit he led, he would bend over backwards to ensure his Marines provided what we needed. I was watching their efforts through the window of my Humvee from approximately one hundred yards away. It was a normal hot, humid, sticky Iraqi night, and the Marines were sweating profusely in their combat gear as they worked steadily to get the tires changed. It was one of those moments in command that are so terribly frustrating. Nevertheless, it demands rigid self-discipline because if you weigh in yelling and screaming to get things moving, you will only make the situation worse. Besides, that was not my style. The Marines were all doing their best, and I just had to be patient, as hard as that was. The enemy did not seem to be aware of what we were doing, so as long as no one was actually shooting, we could afford some time for the patrol and the convoy to get back on track.

At the same time, the Iraqi army battalion to the north of the city was moving to its assigned positions to form a security cordon around the precinct we were securing. We had not heard from the Marines working with the Iraqi battalion, and since I could see some of them moving into position both on my BFT screen (Marine vehicles accompanied the Iraqi battalion), I had to assume all was going well there. There had been no IED explosions and no shooting, so no news or noise were good things. The police were another matter. We had no way of knowing if they were executing the role we had briefed them on and which we had all rehearsed the previous day. We could not see any of their vehicles and had no one traveling with them. They were supposed to be conducting raids on specific

targets within the precinct based on their own intelligence. Only time would tell what they were actually up to.

After about an hour, the combat patrol began moving to the right location and the logistics convoy had gotten the tires on the damaged truck fixed and was moving out. They moved quickly and efficiently along the designated route that would form the precinct's perimeter and were placing the Jersey barriers to restrict vehicle traffic. The combat patrol had reached the empty school we had chosen to be the JSS, had secured it, and were rapidly fortifying it. The idea was that by the time the sun came up, all security measures would be in place to present a fait accompli. The insurgents could try to attack us, but we would be prepared and waiting for them.

Getting one of these JSSs set up turned out to be an interesting drill. The Marines would move in and set up a security watch around the site. Then others would sweep the building for enemy or IEDs. During the preliminary reconnaissance patrols used to select the future JSS, several different buildings were always checked to keep the enemy guessing as to which one we would actually use. We always assumed the insurgents were watching us, and we never took chances with a wily enemy who had taken advantage of units that were not careful enough. After the building was swept, vehicle and personnel barriers were put in place to control the traffic going into the JSS, and any site that housed a Marine or Iraqi security person was reinforced with wooden structures and buried under a mound of sand bags. Razor-sharp concertina wire was placed in many different areas. Moreover, because we were also always wary of treachery from the Iraqis with whom we were working, we would designate a safe room inside the JSS that would be reinforced and into which the Marines could barricade and defend themselves until help arrived. None of these were ever used, but it always made for a good insurance policy.

The morning of May 30 dawned bright and hot as usual. By this time of year, the blow dryer was on full blast and one always prayed, in vain, for a cloudy day to cut the heat. Our first foray into the swarm business had gone well. The JSS was set up and the Iraqi army was operating checkpoints around the precinct. We checked in with the police and found they had not actually gone out during the night. But first thing in the morning, they rounded up just about every adult male in the district, and Chief Faisal

stood up in front of them with a bullhorn and read them the riot act. It was actually amusing to watch. He was a feisty character, and anyone who talked back to him was pulled from the crowd and questioned closely by other police officers. The gist of what he said to them was that things would be different in Fallujah from now on: You can get with the program, get arrested, or leave. The choice is yours. The amazing thing about this act was that the majority of the Iraqis loved the speech. It was as if they had been waiting for an Iraqi to take charge. It was yet another lesson in Iraqi culture. Most Americans would have been irritated, at best, at being rounded up and insulted by the chief of police. In the end, it was not at all what we had planned, but it certainly seemed to work. It was as if a layer of oil had been poured on turbulent water and calmed it to the point where almost nothing happened in that precinct any more.

While all this was occurring, our civil affairs team, led by the indomitable CWO4 Steve Townsley, was leading a mixed patrol around the precinct. They were escorted by the police and were distributing soccer balls, Iraqi flags, candy, and, most important, enormous bags of foodstuffs, sufficient to feed a family of four for three to four days. The goodwill engendered by this patrol alone was amazing to watch. The police had never been part of something like this before, nor had the Fallujans seen their police acting in such a benevolent manner. The people were all smiles. Unfortunately, we could not see whether the police were smiling because most, still mortally afraid of being targeted, wore ski masks or balaclavas to hide their identity. They were actively involved, though, and were passing out flyers and speaking on loudspeakers to announce we would be hiring one hundred neighborhood watch personnel from their precinct. Instructions were passed as to where to go, when to be there, and what to bring. This also generated a good bit of excitement among the Iraqis since they would have money in their pockets if hired. We would not pay a lot, but it was better than nothing, which is what the young men had been making for some time.

Another aspect of the swarm were the mosque speakers we bought and mounted on the roof of the JSS. We began to play various songs, announce public service messages, and even play some items from the radio, such as religious programming. One would think that this would have become annoying, but we did not maintain a constant barrage of noise and did not

play anything at prayer times when the mosques would broadcast the call to prayer. The Iraqis seemed to like what they were hearing and would come out of their houses to listen to the national anthem, announcements, and programming. The people of the neighborhood actually starting dancing in the streets when the Iraqi national anthem was first played. The police chief for the precinct took ownership of the system and put it to good use. Whereas it had started with what we and our interpreters thought would be appropriate, he shaped it into what he knew the people of the area wanted. We had our interpreters listen in on what was being broadcast to ensure they did not go off message, but we never had any issues with what the precinct chief came up with. His focus was on public service announcements and providing instruction such as how the people needed to support the police and work together to get rid of the terrorists.

This first swarm operation progressed quietly for the most part. The only exception was when a suicide bomber attacked a police patrol and killed one policeman on the second day of the swarm. Several others were injured, and our battalion surgeon, Lt. Matt Swain (USN), who had an aid station set up in the JSS, quickly stabilized the injured policemen and got them evacuated to the hospital. What we did not realize at the time was that a stringer used by United Press International reported that several dozen Coalition personnel were killed in the attack. This “reporter” was a particularly unreliable source who maintained a blog site that had interviews with former Iraqi Baathists living in Syria. He was more than a little biased and took the bait offered by those who had coordinated the attack, hook, line, and sinker. To make matters worse, the report was published without checking the facts, which resulted in a great deal of consternation and stress for our families back in the United States. Everyone knew we were in Fallujah and that we were the only Coalition Forces unit in Fallujah. Major Benson quickly discovered what had happened and got word back to the families that the story was not true. We had actually been expecting a lot more of an enemy reaction, but nothing else happened during the first swarm. It was as if the enemy was confused by what we were doing and had decided to step back and wait to see what was happening.

The recruiting for neighborhood watch personnel started on the morning of the second day, and it went surprisingly well. We were concerned that

most would be too intimidated to show up at the JSS, but we were wrong. At the appointed time, we had a long line of men waiting to be screened. We also had a number of elders from the area present to vouch for those in line to keep insurgents from joining the neighborhood watch. Once we had screened and hired one hundred new members of the neighborhood watch, the police gave them rudimentary weapons training while we issued them whistles along with numbered, light blue shirts so we could identify them on the streets. We paid them with a pool of funds we had available for emergency situations. The police soon had them out on the streets patrolling and reporting problems, which had another significant impact on the enemy's calculations. The enemy now had to contend with one hundred or more sets of eyes watching for them, in part because the families of these men helped them as well, instead of just the limited police, Iraqi army, and Marine patrols. Less than a week had gone by before we had the first win for the neighborhood watch. They reported a burglary in progress to a police patrol they had flagged down. The burglars were quickly captured, and Chief Faisal touted this "win" at the next city council meeting. It was well-received.

With the establishment of the precinct, we assigned a lieutenant from our battalion to work with a lieutenant from the police who had been designated the precinct chief. For this first precinct, Lt. Nick DeLonga was the first out the gate. We could not have made a better choice. He was ably assisted by his platoon sergeant, SSgt. Stward Merillat. Both were smart, motivated young men who took care of their Marines and understood what needed to happen with this precinct. They spent hours each day working with their Iraqi counterparts to build up their confidence. Both constantly moved about the precinct area to check on their Marines as well as on the progress of the different civil affairs initiatives. They also developed a weekly report that set the standard for all subsequent precincts. These Marines understood the reality that they had to treat the police and army personnel as equals and do whatever they could to increase their effectiveness. All lived together in the same building, and DeLonga and Merillat frequently had to deal with the usual friction between the police and the army. DeLonga also had to recruit and guide the precinct council that was established. We wanted to get the Fallujans involved in the effort to deal with the challenges in the city. DeLonga got them started off on the

right foot, and though the meetings were a serious test of patience for any American in the room, they actually did start to come up with some Iraqi solutions. All in all, it was a masterful job by them and their platoon of young Marines, many of whom were only a year or two out of high school or college. None had received training for these tasks, but they took to them as if they had been conducting these sorts of operations for years.

On June 3, I attended the next weekly city council meeting. You could tell the city's momentum was shifting to the Iraqi government and the Marines. The Iraqi police, with the assistance of the Marines, struck an al-Qaeda cell in the southeast industrial section of town, killing several insurgents as well as capturing two car bombs and several suicide vests. It had been a decisive mission and was generating a lot of support from the people and injecting new vigor into Fallujah's leadership as the swarm program went forward. City council chairman Sheik Hamid opened the meeting by expressing his warm feelings for the Iraqi police for their recent mission with Coalition Forces against a VBIED (vehicle-borne improvised explosive device) factory in the industrial section of Fallujah. He especially thanked everyone who had been on that dangerous mission, and he expressed his continued hope that everyone would keep working together to put an end to terrorism in Fallujah. He then stated that the people of Fallujah were feeling positive about the ongoing security plans and felt happy at the ongoing successes. He expressed his desire that the swarm operations continue and cited the industrial section of town as an area of the city desperately in need of a swarm-type operation. He said that that area was a hotbed of insurgent activity and was where most of the VBIEDs in the city were constructed. He asked security forces in the city to surround the area with razor wire so that there was only one access point to it and said the community in the area would support the operations. Following these opening remarks, an Iraqi police representative spoke about security in the city.

He expressed his honor at being at the city council meeting and said he was happy with recent Iraqi police security operations and that the police had been doing a great job. He then mentioned the opening of a new police

precinct in the Khadairy neighborhood. With security, he said, should come an improvement in basic services and the standard of living in the newly cleared area, and he said curfews would continue to limit civilian traffic and that only government trucks were allowed to operate in the area. He said that the swarm operations were multipurpose and that an improvement in services was needed once security had been established. Not many services had yet been seen, he lamented, but local residents were still very supportive of the police and army and had been turning in information on suspected al-Qaeda members. He then exhorted the attendees to continue to not let the “bad guys” into the city and that the people and the Iraqi security forces needed to stand shoulder to shoulder, that they should have no fear, and that they must continue to work together. He then said that al-Qaeda killed innocent people by beheading them and that operations must continue against them. He then shifted the conversation by saying that some members of the local government were involved with al-Qaeda and were supporting their activities. It was unclear whether he was referring to Sheik Bakr or perhaps others on the city council and in the municipal government, but it was yet another sign that Iraqi forces were gaining confidence and the upper hand against the insurgency and could now openly challenge al-Qaeda’s supporters. In this type of warfare, victory may not be a decisive battle, but the signs of winning were beginning to appear.

About the same time as this first swarm was kicking off, the effects of the surge in U.S. forces was making itself felt around the city. The U.S. Army unit that had been operating in Karmah had been replaced and moved out of the area. A good friend of mine, Lt. Col. Joe Letoile, and his 2nd Battalion 7th Marines had moved into Karmah and were settling the area down. He also owned the area to the north and southeast of Fallujah and had several more companies attached to his battalion to help in controlling such a large area. The platoon we had sent to Karmah a month earlier returned, and due to Joe’s efforts, the rat lines insurgents used to infiltrate back into the city began to dry up. This had not happened previously because Coalition Forces were spread too thin and the insurgents blended into the population

of the surrounding villages and towns too well. All that was changing because with the increased security presence came a newfound sense of security among the Iraqis. They felt that if they came forward and cooperated, the insurgents would not be able to target them. They used this opportunity to turn on the al-Qaeda in Iraq insurgents and drive them out or kill them. It really was an amazing process to watch.

To the west of Fallujah, Lt. Col. Jim McGrath and his 3rd Battalion 6th Marines were operating in an area known as the "peninsula," formed by a loop in the Euphrates River. This had been a rough area where we had lost a lot of Marines on my previous deployment. This was the place where Sheik Khamis and his deputy, Aifan Saddun, had control as described in chapter 7. They had their own security forces and maintained tight control of the peninsula, blocking anyone trying to come into Fallujah from the west. Prior to this development, we had received rocket fire from this area on a regular basis, and we had never been able to catch the insurgents who were responsible. Thankfully, while the attacks were nerve-wracking, they were not accurate, so we never lost any Marines. Once the peninsula had been secured by Aifan Saddun and his men, we did not get rocketed anymore. These developments were yet another factor in the turning of Fallujah.

The only area that remained relatively open to insurgent activity was directly to the south of Fallujah, and we had to stretch to cover it. It was a poor rural area, and not much ever seemed to occur there because it was packed close to the Euphrates River and no one ever passed through it. Thus outsiders readily stood out. Captain McCormack and his Marines continued to conduct patrols in that area and stayed for days at a time. Coming into close contact with the local population was both rewarding and difficult for him and his Marines. The people were simple and did not have much, but they always welcomed any Marines who stayed with them. Unfortunately, because the government had never vaccinated anyone in the area, there were a significant number of birth defects and childhood diseases such as polio. It was heart-wrenching to see the disfigured children and have the parents ask for help for their kids, but we were not allowed to coordinate treatment for any Iraqis unless they had been hurt in an accident or by combat and their lives, limbs, or eyesight depended on that treatment. Long-term health issues were to be handled by the Iraqi health system, which was rudimentary and sporadic at best. We would have liked to have

done something, but there were so many in need that we would have overwhelmed our own medical system, to no avail since most had incurable issues. I cannot help thinking that we missed out on a great opportunity to build goodwill both in this area and in Fallujah because of this policy, but our hands were tied. It was the policy of our government, and we were obliged to follow it.

It was also about this time that one of the more agonizing incidents occurred in the city. We were still experiencing issues with IEDs, though we were finding many more than were actually triggered on us. We put a significant effort into targeting the IED emplacers with our sniper teams to raise the ante and hopefully cause the less dedicated insurgents, those who were only doing it to make some money, to shy away from this activity. One of our teams was in the southern part of the city around June 18 and watched as a young man left the compound of a house and seemed to furtively move out into the street. He dug a hole and then a trench leading back to the compound he came out of. The hole was right near one of the paths we had recently used to conduct a foot patrol in that area. The sniper team watched the young man for more than an hour as he moved about doing things that looked as if he were placing an IED. The guidance I had passed was to do everything possible to be sure of their target, then make a judgment call and take the shot if they thought they were right. They made the call and took the shot, which killed the young man. Unfortunately, they were wrong. It turned out that the young man was a mentally challenged individual who was doing what many Fallujans did on a regular basis. When they did not receive utility services, they found a way to illegally tap into the service they needed. In this case, his family wanted running water, so they tapped into an underground water main and set up a small pump and then ran small pipes into their house. We traced it all out when we investigated the shooting. It was a sad case of mistaken identity for which I took full responsibility. The sniper team had followed my guidance, and even if they had called to ask permission, based on what they saw before taking the shot, I would have told them to shoot.

When things like this happen, we normally made a *solatia* payment, which is customary in Iraqi culture and is both a form of apology and a way to make amends to the family of the victim. Late at night on June 20, we conducted a foot patrol to the house of the young man. Sweating profusely

on yet another baking night, we knocked on the door and were let in. Our interpreter explained why we had come, and the family could not have been more gracious. None of the men seemed to have their senses about them, but the women seemed to be holding things together in the family. We brought them food bags and then made the payment to the family. The mother of the young man was sad but grateful for what we had brought them. It was yet another lesson in Iraqi culture. This would have been a terrible event for an American family, and anyone responsible for it would have caught hell. When I explained, through the interpreter, that I was the Marine who commanded the forces in the city and that it was one of my teams who had shot her son, she cried, but she understood when I explained that it was a terrible mistake and apologized for what had happened. She accepted the explanation as the will of God and also the apology with a grace that I have seldom seen matched.

Yet another amazing thing to see was that the vehicle ban in the city was holding up surprisingly well, while some Fallujans were taking full advantage of the situation. A group of young entrepreneurs had sprung up at the exit of each ECP. They had assembled all manner of hand carts, brought them to each ECP, and offered their services, for a fee, to cart to their destination whatever those coming into the city were carrying. It seemed to work quite well for all involved. The city council also organized buses to transport people into and around the city, also for a small charge. The Fallujans themselves took all these measures, and we simply marveled at how they did it, as well as how the Fallujans reacted to the ban. We also marveled at the women who were walking long distances in the broiling heat while wearing their black, head-to-toe burqas. I could only imagine how hot it must have been walking around in one of those things during an Iraqi summer. What was even more amazing was that if an Iraqi family was coming in with kids in tow, the mother would be carrying the child or pulling one along by the arm while the husband walked ahead unencumbered by anything. This was yet another custom that would have been very different in the United States. We would stand at the checkpoints and talk to people as they walked by. They all understood why the ban was necessary and most said that if it kept suicide vehicle bombs out, they were willing to walk. As this was happening, we kept thinking about how

Americans would have reacted to a similar attack and vehicle ban. I doubt they would have handled it as gracefully as the Iraqis.

One of the last aspects of this first swarm was the assessment system we set up to measure the progress the precinct was making. We developed a list of questions that needed to be asked, then a number of inspection items that the assessment team would look for in the precinct. Major Benson led the assessment team, and in keeping with every other aspect of a swarm, it also had Iraqi police and army personnel in the group. They conducted the first assessment a couple of weeks after the establishment of the Khadairy precinct and spent the better part of a day in the JSS or out patrolling in the precinct to get a feel for how things were going. This was another thing that the Iraqis did not really understand but caught on to quickly. They had made progress in most areas, but the one area that they had issues with was the one that perennially plagued both the police and the army: logistical support. Planning ahead and requesting what they would need was not one of their strong suits. They would often wait until they had run out of something and then complain that they were not being supported by their higher headquarters. We had put one of our logistics officers, Lt. Rob Neman, in the headquarters for the police to alleviate this issue, and while he did make some progress, it was also another cultural issue. The favorite saying among Iraqis is “Inshallah” which means something like “if God wills it.” It bled over into their approach to just about everything and always clashed with the American drive to “fix it now.”

It had been a busy couple of weeks, but we had our first swarm under our belts and all had gone exceptionally well. The relative peace and quiet achieved in that first precinct set the tone for the other sections of the city. The Fallujans who lived outside of the first precinct started to clamor for us to come to their area next, especially when they saw the effort we were putting into the civil affairs aspects of our operation. The barriers and controlled entry and exit points were a nuisance, but the peace and security were welcome. That they could now go out into their neighborhood without fear of getting shot or blown up was a major improvement in their lives. It was now time to start swarming other precincts and expanding our control over the whole city.

|| Chapter 10 ||

A Sheik Returns and Another Departs

My duties were simple; I was to encourage the local inhabitants to stand up for themselves.

Alec Kirkbride, *An Awakening: The Arab Campaign 1917–18* (London: University Press of Arabia, 1971), p. 104

With Operation Alljah going forward and security conditions starting to improve in the city of Fallujah, I returned to my other interest, which was working with the tribes around the city to facilitate greater security in their communities. On May 30, I accompanied the executive officer for Regimental Combat Team 6, Lt. Col. John Reeve, as he journeyed to the village of Shahabi to the northeast of Fallujah to meet with the Provincial Security Forces leadership of the Jumayli tribe. The Jumayli tribe was arrayed to the north and northeast of Fallujah and was spread out among a number of small towns and villages. Largely because it did not have the Euphrates River and the desert to serve as buffers for its territory, the group was much more susceptible to al-Qaeda's influence. The tribe was led by a man named Sheik Meshan, who at the time was living in Syria because of threats from al-Qaeda. Different photographs I had seen of him and reporting suggested that he was a diminutive man who was quiet in nature and, unlike his friend Sheik Khamis of the Albu Issa tribe, preferred calm deliberations rather than bold gestures. He had a small black-and-white goatee that framed his small chin,

and he always seemed to have a pleasant smile on his amiable face. His position was not as strong as he would have liked, and rivals constantly sought to undermine him and create tension with his security chief. One so-called tribal chief always approached U.S. units in the area saying how the British had selected him as head of the Jumayli tribe and that we needed to recognize his claim. The various subtribes, clans, and families of the Iraqi tribes were always looking for an advantage, and it had taken U.S. forces quite a while to sort out the different claimants. Saddam Hussein had also meddled in tribal affairs by elevating the leaders of different subtribes over others to sow discord within the tribe and to strengthen his own position.

Much like the Albu Issa tribe west of Fallujah, the Jumayli also had a security chief, Saadun, a former Iraqi air force general, who was charged with raising a security force for the tribe as well as serving as an interlocutor with U.S. forces for training and assistance. As the Marines and I approached the village of Shahabi we stopped by a new checkpoint erected just outside its boundaries. It was a makeshift structure largely comprised of Hesco barriers set along the main road into the village. A wide expanse of desert surrounded it, giving the guards there ample opportunity to spot a suspicious vehicle or to see al-Qaeda fighters approaching from the city. A large bongo truck, a term used to refer to small Korean-made lorries, was backed up to the barriers and had a large-caliber machine gun set up on its bed. As we exited our vehicles we greeted General Saadun and his men as they waited for us near the checkpoint. Saadun was wearing a dark blue sports jersey, gray pants, and a tightly wound scarf around his head. He had a gray beard that ringed his face and dark glasses as a short-stock AK-47 dangled off his shoulder. He was surrounded by similarly dressed Jumayli tribesmen, most of whom were also in sports jerseys, and if not for the vouching of Lieutenant Colonel Reeve, it would have been safe to assume the men were insurgents instead of our erstwhile allies in the Fallujah area. We traveled to this region of Fallujah because we were just starting to build the necessary security environment in the area to help the tribe fight al-Qaeda. We met at an abandoned building, which might have been a school at one point, near the village as the Marines and the tribesmen provided security. Reeve was about 6'4", had a lanky frame, and was an easygoing Marine officer. As Simcock’s deputy he frequently engaged the Fallujah tribes on behalf of the Regimental Combat Team.

He began the meeting by telling General Saadun that the Jumayli Provincial Security Force would be increasing in size in the next few weeks as more tribesmen were trained. Over the course of the next two months, the initial fifty-man force of Jumayli would increase to approximately two hundred men. Largely for this reason, Reeve asked Saadun whether a man named Captain Makmud (who was not yet present at the meeting) would be a good overall commander of this increased security force. Reeve asked Saadun whether Makmud had been an officer in the Iraqi army, because the person in charge of the expanded Jumayli security forces would receive an officer's pay. The general said that Makmud had not been an officer, but he had been selected as leader of the Karmah Provincial Security Forces, a village northeast of Shahabi, due to his aggressiveness and that he had been given an officer's rank because of his good work. Reeve suggested that Makmud might serve better as a platoon commander and that an overall leader, preferably from the ranks of the Hussein regime's military, be chosen as the commander. He also suggested that perhaps Chief Faisal of the Fallujah police might know of some possible candidates. Saadun said that Faisal was not from the area and would not know who would be an appropriate leader for the full-strength Provincial Security Force and thus shouldn't make such a decision. Reeve then said that whoever was selected should probably be agreed upon by all the interested parties and that the person's background must be known because he would be responsible for the well-being of his men. General Saadun nodded in agreement and the meeting continued.

General Saadun began by saying that the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police had distinct responsibilities and roles. He said the police were presently more focused on combat rather than on policing duties as under the old regime and the army needed to fight wars and be well-trained. Saadun said he did not mean to denigrate what the Iraqi police had been doing and he recognized they had a difficult job to do, but he felt this was the natural evolution of things in the country. He said the Marines needed to continue to train men to protect the villages and that the Provincial Security Forces needed to continue to work closely with the Iraqi police and the Marines. Reeve then reviewed the training schedule for the Jumayli tribes and said they were scheduled to have at least two classes of fifty men each for July and possibly another in August. He then went over the general plan for

training Provincial Security Forces in the greater Fallujah area and reiterated our intention to train only vetted men who would return to protect their home village and tribal area. General Saadun said that these were good plans and that the Jumayli PSF would continue to work closely with the police for good order. He then said that as an area's security improved the economy and local development should increase as well.

Saadun then praised the security plan for the city of Fallujah, which had started the previous evening, and said that if it worked no one would join al-Qaeda. He then said he did not know why people joined al-Qaeda in Iraq because they accomplished nothing and destroyed families and homes. The people will only follow them when they are cowed into doing so through the threat of violence. He then said that many sheiks were willing to join with the Iraqi police and the Marines and that additional training slots for the Jumayli tribesmen would continue the positive direction security was taking in the area. He then mentioned that a sheik who had been inclined to support the Marines and Iraqi police had recently been killed by al-Qaeda when the group arrived at his home in about four or five trucks. The sheik, Al Mass, was gunned down at his home in the village of Citra to the west of Karmah, and the al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters had come from an area around the town of Hit. Saadun said that the area around Citra was where he next planned to expand and that the sheik had wanted protection. He also said that the people in that village were very interested in joining the Provincial Security Forces and wanted to work closely with the Marines. Reeve then mentioned that a new training academy had been opened in Habbaniyah but that each course was approximately two months long. He then mentioned that according to the latest training schedule at the new academy the current classes were slated for the Albu Issa tribe and the city of Fallujah and it would be a while until the Jumayli would be able to procure positions. General Saadun finished the meeting by saying the Marines needed to respond quickly to a sheik's call for help and that by doing so more and more sheiks would join the effort to fight al-Qaeda.

We departed Shahabi en route to Camp Baharia, the home of the 2nd Battalion 6th Marines as well as a training camp for the tribal Provincial Security Forces. A small camp existed within Camp Baharia where Fallujah's SEAL Team and Marines trained each week's class of tribal members. Most of the SEALs much preferred to conduct direct-action raids

at night on al-Qaeda and insurgent targets, but their mission had shifted as the war progressed and now, for a week at a time, a small number of them trained upwards of fifty tribesmen. Reeve and I were attending the graduation ceremony for fifty Jumayli tribesmen. Police Chief Faisal was there as well as an Iraqi army representative, and we ascended a raised platform waiting for the graduates to arrive. A few minutes later they marched in good order into the compound. They each wore a green helmet and blue bulletproof vest as well as the green and black battle dress uniform that U.S. soldiers typically wore. As they marched in, their arms would rise to chest level and their hands were clenched into small fists. Once they had arrived, they halted and then turned to their left toward us and with a quick step stood at attention. A makeshift table sat before them with three rows of Iraqi police hats neatly organized as well as several police patches. As the name of each tribesman was called, he marched forward and presented himself to Chief Faisal with a quick stomp of his foot and a salute. Faisal would then present him his certificate, hat, and patch and the man would march back to his position. Many of the men held the certificate aloft before they returned to the ranks declaring in a loud voice their support for their country. It was a moving scene, and I often wondered why it had taken so long for our country and military to adopt the strategy of working with the tribes to turn the tide against the insurgency. Once the men had received their diplomas they marched back to their temporary barracks. As Reeve and I walked back to our Humvee we had a moment to review several Ford trucks that were slated to be given to the tribesmen as vehicles for their security forces. Each was painted white and blue, the colors of the Iraqi police, and each had had several metal plates attached to it as well as a makeshift turret for a machine gun. Each tribe received a small number of these trucks to supplement its security forces.

As more of its tribal members were trained by the Marines and the Fallujah SEAL Team, the Jumayli tribe was slowly but determinedly expanding security in its home area. It was still unclear to me exactly how much security was needed to entice the Jumayli tribal head, Sheik Meshan, to return from his self-imposed exile in Syria, but the general direction for security in his area was positive and increasingly large numbers of subsheiks and their followers were keen to join the burgeoning Provincial Security Forces. Logistical constraints continued to be a challenge with

respect to training and equipping indigenous security forces, but with Operation Alljah going forward and the campaign's momentum clearly in our favor, it was only a matter of time before Meshan returned and al-Qaeda was defeated.

After months of secretly shuttling between Iraq and Jordan, where he had been having a series of meetings with the tribal sheiks, Brig. Gen. John Allen's efforts to entice the paramount sheik of the Jumayli tribe, Sheik Meshan, to return to his tribal area and rally his tribe against al-Qaeda had paid off. The diminutive sheik arrived in Fallujah on June 7 and settled down at the residence of Sheik Khamis, a relative of his family's, in the Albu Issa tribal area as planning went ahead for his successful return. After a few days at Camp Fallujah and a couple of nights with Sheik Khamis, Meshan returned to his tribal area in Karmah. The Marines had trained about fifty of Meshan's tribesmen to provide a security detail for him and his home and were proceeding apace to put another fifty through the abbreviated police training. His home had been reinforced by Hesco wire baskets, and the various roads into town had had similar barriers erected for his tribal militia to control. With the great efforts of Lt. Col. Joe Letoile in the Karmah area it was only a matter of time before the Jumayli tribe would sort out its al-Qaeda problem.

One measure of our success in Fallujah was how well attended the weekly city council meetings were and how many different groups of people—tribal representatives, municipal officials, judges, etc.—attended. On June 19, I attended the latest city council meeting, and you could feel the success of Operation Alljah and tribal engagement in the air. Both Sheik Aifan Saddun of the Albu Issa tribe and General Saadun of the Jumayli tribe were there as well as the directors of water, sewage, communications, and municipalities. The mayor and Chief Faisal were there as well as Sheik Hamid. "Sheik" Abu Bakr of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council was also

there after returning from his “vacation” to Syria. Politics was starting to play a more central role in the activities of the city as security concerns began to recede. It was going to be an interesting experience.

Sheik Hamid opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and then briefly mentioned that both he and the mayor had long been talking about solving the city’s problems, and he exhorted the attendees to focus on finding solutions. The mayor then spoke up by stating that the city of Fallujah was being cleared of terrorists and that it was now important to find jobs for the people and to continue to maintain the bus and shuttle service that the city was operating. He also stressed that fuel availability was still a concern. Chief Faisal then said that current security operations in the city were going well and that the people were now interested in getting basic services up and running. He said the people wanted fuel, power, medicine, and security. Faisal then said that a true friend was someone who helped in hard times as well as in the good times. He said that a member of the Iraqi police was in charge of each precinct in the city and that he would remove the curfew conditions on a swarm neighborhood if the precinct captain deemed security to have improved. Faisal stated that he had closed the industrial section of town as a security precaution and asked for men to volunteer to serve in the Iraqi police. Sheik Hamid then thanked Chief Faisal for his report and publicly thanked Faisal on behalf of the city council for his hard work.

Once the meeting had concluded, Lieutenant Colonel Mullen, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Townsley, and I broke off for a separate meeting with the mayor. Even though a lot of additional assistance had been lined up for him, it was important to constantly meet with Mayor Saad to assure him of our enduring support. The mayor said that his health was okay and that he had a doctor’s appointment for kidney stones scheduled at Camp Fallujah in a couple of weeks. The conversation then turned to the attendance of Abu Bakr at the city council meetings. Mullen expressed his concern that since Bakr was not a member of the city council, did not represent the Zobai tribe on it, and was an intimidating influence on the other members, it might be a good idea to stop his attendance. The mayor said that he had no specific proof of any bad behavior by Bakr but that no one liked him and he was not trusted. The mayor thought the Marines were allowing Bakr to attend, and we thought the Iraqis tolerated his presence because he had some standing

in the community. Once it was determined that no one wanted him there, it was agreed that the mayor's security detail would prevent his attendance at future meetings of the council. The mayor then said that he would be traveling to Baghdad with Sheik Hamid and two senior leaders of Fallujah to talk with the minister of foreign affairs who was also on the Anbar Security Committee. They would discuss how things had improved in the city and district of Fallujah and that the central government needed to free up money for projects. Mullen said he would look into providing a helicopter for the trip. The momentum in the city had clearly swung toward the government and its supporters. With "Sheik" Bakr barred from future city council meetings and both the municipal government and civil society working more closely together, we were definitely riding the wave of success in the city, which would only improve as more neighborhoods were swarmed.

|| Chapter 11 ||

The Deluge

To the religious fanatic, all the human race except his own sect are enemies of God, deserving of extermination. With such persons, there can be no question of sport, honour or fair play.

John Bagot Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 1978

As the summer progressed, we fell into a set routine with the swarms. Every two to three weeks, we would start another and then alternate between tougher and calmer areas to keep from having too many pots bubbling. After we started with Khadairy, we focused on the southwest part of the city to swarm Jubayl. While it was a more turbulent operation due to the personality of the assigned precinct chief, there was no violence. The precinct chief decided, after the JSS had been established, that he preferred a different building and moved his police into it. He then expected us to set up the protective measures for that building just like we had done for the JSS. Initial discussions got nowhere as the chief was obdurate, so I let him know in no uncertain terms that if he wanted our protection, it would be in the buildings we had established. He had occupied someone's private residence (because it was nicer than the building we selected), and he needed to move his police to the JSS. He did not like being told what to do, but there would be no support from his police headquarters anywhere near like we provided, so the police moved to the new location. Surprisingly, we got along well after that and this chief

turned out to be one of the better ones in the city. After Jubayl, we swarmed another quiet area named Dubat. The only notable incident happened while members of my security detail and I were watching Faisal conduct his patented swarm pep talk with the young men of the city. We were standing near a metal gate leading into a family's compound and were passing candy underneath it to the kids inside, who were giggling and talking to us in Arabic. An older man came up to us and asked us in perfect English, "Are they going to take these young men away?" I told him that they would not be taken away, so he asked me, "Well when are they going to be done then? We have work to do." I chuckled to myself at the incongruity of the conversation, in perfect English, as Faisal got his team ready for the big game. It was clear the older man was not impressed with the chief's rhetoric.

After the difficulties of Jubayl, the other swarms seemed to be on greased skids. The citizens of Fallujah clamored for us to get to their neighborhoods as quickly as possible. We maintained our measured pace to ensure we did not run out of materials and because we were waiting for the enemy to react. The swarms were stretching us thin, and we did not want to be caught short if the enemy cobbled together a good-sized force to attack one of our JSSs. With regard to supplies for each swarm, my logistics officer, Maj. Kenric Stevenson, whom I had the pleasure of promoting earlier in the month, and his folks were pulling off virtual miracles with every swarm. They ensured that we had everything we needed just in time for each swarm. I do not know how they did it, but their efforts were essential to our success. The series of steps we would take to swarm each neighborhood were largely identical for each precinct we swarmed over the rest of the summer. We expected trouble in Jolan (northwest section of the city) because it had been a bad spot during the Al Fajr fighting and had quietly sparked ever since. We also expected trouble in the Al-Andalus neighborhood, because that was where the sniper ambush had killed Lieutenant Manion, but both it and Jolan went quiet. It seemed too easy, but we also seemed to have established a momentum that was overwhelming the enemy. A strenuous patrolling effort preceded each swarm in order to assess the next area as well as to designate the entry and exit points, select a building for the JSS, and enable the completion of a detailed analysis of what we knew about the bad actors in that area. We would then brief the

plan to all Iraqi and coalition stakeholders and rehearse it in detail. The process of briefing the missions to the Iraqis and walking through each of the steps was tedious and time-consuming, but it kept the Iraqis engaged throughout the process. We would also bribe them with a trip to our dining facility at the end of each rehearsal. They were not too keen on American-style food, but they absolutely loved ice cream and ate it by the gallon.

Some of the best memories of our time in Fallujah were when we shared meals with the Iraqi soldiers and police. We would talk to them about normal things like our personal interests and families. We discovered that we really did have many common interests despite being from different cultures. The thing that seemed to amaze them the most was that we had a chaplain in our battalion and that many of us attended religious services regularly. Most Americans tended to avoid any discussion of religion with the Iraqis, and this had left them with the impression that Americans were agnostic at best, atheistic at worst. They were surprised to hear that we were not either of the above and were willing to discuss religion with them in general terms. It almost seemed that they accepted us to a greater extent once they knew we cared about religion much like they did. As a matter of fact, when our battalion chaplain, Lt. Ben Sandford (USN), proposed to engage with the imams in Fallujah, we were initially hesitant because of a concern for their religious sensitivities. But Sandford convinced me he understood the red lines and thought he could do some good for the overall cause with such an engagement. He could not have been more right! The imams were enthusiastic to talk with a fellow man of God, and the discussions opened doors for us that we had never thought possible. They helped us with the process of identifying reliable Fallujans to work with and also became a good source of information on who needed help the most. Sandford arranged for the imams to receive supplies so they would have things with which to help the people of their area. He also started a process whereby congregations from the United States “adopted” mosques in the Fallujah area and sent them aid. The result was that the imams started preaching cooperation during their Friday sermons. Sandford really hit the gold mine with his recommendation and actions!

There were still challenges from the enemy, but their activities focused on the neighborhood watch personnel. This proved to be another mistake on their part. The police used the neighborhood watch to staff checkpoints at seemingly random points. The challenge was that these checkpoints were often nowhere near any of the protective shelters we had built. We would come across them as we moved about the city and ask them why they were out there and what they were supposed to be doing. None ever had a good answer, but we left them alone after talking to them so as to not undermine the police. A man on a bike attacked one of these checkpoints in the Jubayl area. He fired at the men at the checkpoint with his AK-47, then pedaled away as fast as he could. He was not fast enough. Several civilians who were not involved with the neighborhood watch followed the guy on the bike and saw the house he entered. They then flagged down one of our patrols, pointed to the house, and explained who was in there. The man surrendered without a fight and went away for a long time because so many had seen what he had done and felt free to write witness statements about it. Word about this incident must have made the rounds among the insurgents. Fallujah was no longer a safe area for them.

As the swarms progressed from one area to another, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Townsley and his civil affairs Marines also had another job besides what they did during each swarm. They had been quietly talking with civic leaders for several weeks to assess how we could best start the process of cleaning up and getting life back to some semblance of normalcy. In the guidance I had passed during the planning for Operation Alljah, I had listed three factors that were to be the first priority for restoration—electricity, clean water, and sewage removal. This may sound basic, and the reader may ask why the Iraqis did not have these things already, since it had been several years since the major fighting in 2004. But in many ways, Fallujah had been going through an extended natural disaster since that time. The only difference was that the disaster was manmade instead of natural. Power lines had become mangled, and in most cases people had jury-rigged power lines to their houses from any source they could find. In many neighborhoods, an enterprising soul had bought a large generator and charged people for plugging into it to power their houses. The fighting had damaged some of these, but few Iraqis actually did the required maintenance on these generators, so many of them had given out.

Electricity also ran the pumps for clean water as well as the ones that removed sewage. The fighting had also damaged or destroyed some of these pumps, while some fell into the same category as the generators. No maintenance, so no continued operation.

As we looked at things we could do to make a quick and positive impact on the lives of the average Fallujan, the first thing we settled on was getting the generators up and running. We brought generator mechanics out with us and taught the people how to maintain them once they were restored to operating condition. We also facilitated getting fuel to the generators and ensured that none of the generator owners were gouging their "customers." We also engaged the city, province, and national power personnel to see what they could do to get Fallujah more reliable power. That was a long-term project that we only made limited progress on before we finished our deployment. Clean water and sewage were also longer-term projects, but we were able to make some progress because several new construction projects had already started, many of which had been stalled due to the fighting. With the establishment of better security, these projects started back up again. New sewage lines were laid along with new water mains, and several water treatment plants were refurbished. We also facilitated the installation of solar street lights throughout the city, and for the first time in years the city was lit up at night. Curiously enough, the Iraqis did not like the solar street lights because they could not pirate electricity from them like they had with the old street lights. With the previous ones, they would cut into the light poles and connect a wire from the pole to their house to get some electricity. This technique did not work with solar lights. We fielded complaints as patiently as possible at the city council meetings, but the solar lights stayed.

In addition to the quick-impact utility projects, we also started the process of general cleanup. There were enormous piles of both rubble and trash throughout the city, and sand from the frequent dust storms had also accumulated in many places. We mobilized the people to start cleaning up both the piles of rotting garbage and the rubble from the fighting. We contracted Fallujans to do the heavier work that needed bulldozers and dump trucks, but it never ceased to amaze me how much could get done with large batches of men with shovels and wheelbarrows. For one large project, Chief Faisal hired hundreds of young men and got them all out on

Highway 10. They worked out in the heat for hours each day sweeping, shoveling, and picking up trash along the road. When they finished, we marveled at what a difference it made to the city's appearance. This activity started an amazing process of urban recovery. It was almost as if the people realized that the nightmare was over and it was time to get on with life. Several projects we had nothing to do with started up, such as at least two water fountains (for beautification apparently), another water tower, and an overpass system to alleviate traffic congestion. We would see the construction starting and ask who was paying for it. In each case it was an Iraqi taking a more active interest in his city's welfare.

All these measures were implemented with every swarm we conducted, and though they may sound basic, they had a significant positive effect on the city and its people. Marine generals and provincial officials that passed through or over the city (in a helicopter) also noticed the difference and started commenting on Fallujah's progress. The people started taking more pride in their community, and it came out in city council meetings. During one particular meeting, the official in charge of garbage collection and removal was making an excuse as to why he was not able to get more done. He said that he had no fuel for his vehicles. At first, no one challenged him on this, so I stood up and said that I frequently saw his garbage trucks driving around the city, so they must have some gas. They also seemed to be in some areas of the city regularly and others not at all. The Iraqis in the meeting started to murmur and then spoke up, asking how this could be and why the trucks did not come to their areas. They had seen trucks out and about; why didn't they have established routes to remove garbage from the whole city? The garbage official sat down in embarrassed silence. Garbage collection got more efficient after that meeting.

Probably the most amazing thing was how quickly the swarmed areas came back to life once we had established security. Kids were out in the streets playing soccer, while adults would come out in the evening to play volleyball. More people were out in general going about their lives. Markets were thriving. In some cases, the impact of the restoration of electrical service was illustrated in other ways. On one baking afternoon in July, my security detail and I were out on a foot patrol in the Shuhada precinct. In one normally crowded area there was almost no one on the streets. We were concerned about this, as it usually indicated a possible ambush. We moved

about tactically looking for what trouble might be waiting for us, but everything remained quiet. Finally, we knocked on the door of a family we were acquainted with and asked where everyone was. The response was that there was a big soccer match on television, and everyone was inside their air conditioned homes watching. Iraqi hospitality being what it was, we were immediately invited in to also watch. Because we had been sweating heavily during our patrol, each of us looked as if a bucket of water had been dumped over our heads. We were embarrassed at being such a sweaty mess, so we declined as politely as we could and continued with the patrol.

The enemy never really seemed to recover or come up with an adequate response. We had been constantly warned about how bad the industrial area (Senaa precinct) was, but it went quietly also. The enemy conducted a number of attacks during the summer, but many were inept at best. During one attack several days after the completion of the swarm in the Senaa precinct, an insurgent with a suicide belt approached one of our checkpoints near the JSS. The police and neighborhood watch at the post aimed their weapons at him and told him to stay back. He then lit off his belt and blew himself in half. No one else was injured. The Iraqis' attitude was that the attack had been stupid and a waste of a life. I could not have agreed more. In a different incident, once vehicles began operating in the city again about midsummer, a pickup truck stopped at a checkpoint leading into the Jolan precinct. The neighborhood watch personnel on post saw that the driver had a suicide vest rigged and was about to trigger it. They dove into the prefabricated bunker we had built for them and were not injured when the bomb went off. My security detail and I arrived shortly after the explosion, and it was evident that the vehicle bomb had been an amateur job. Plastic soda bottles filled with explosives were scattered around the area. They had not been properly rigged to blow up.

On a humorous note, my interpreter became the butt of jokes among members of my security detail. His name was Co Co (we always used pseudonyms to protect those who worked with us from reprisal), and he had been working in Fallujah since 2003. He was a young man who was originally from Baghdad and had a "been there, done that" attitude about everything. He especially liked to brag about all the fighting he had been involved in. As we came up to the site of the explosion, it was a typical scene. Body parts were lying around mixed with pieces of the truck, but

what was always the worst part was the smell. It is hard to describe, but it was a mix of blood, scorched flesh, and diesel fuel. I cannot say I was used to it, but I did my best to ignore it. The Iraqis had already started hosing down the area with fire hoses, and I wanted them to stop so that our explosive-ordnance disposal Marines who were en route could examine the remnants and see if we could find evidence to link the explosion to whoever had put the bomb together. I turned and looked for Co Co to tell them to stop, but he was off behind a traffic barrier throwing up. The smell had gotten to him. After we left the scene, the Marines in the security detail began to call him “Ralph.” He could not figure out why until someone explained to him what it meant. He took it fairly well.

As the swarms continued, we worked on several other large-scale projects. Work at the ECPs never really stopped, but the biggest improvement did not involve construction. Around the beginning of July, our higher headquarters informed me that since things were progressing so fast and well in the city, the Iraqi army units would be pulling out during July for service elsewhere. This was a mixed blessing for us. The Iraqi soldiers were providing security at many points in the city and were the main source of personnel for operating the ECPs. They were also the single largest irritant remaining in the city. There was friction between the police and army. During the swarm of the Al-Andalus neighborhood, Capt. Al Cheng, my company commander in the middle of the city, and his men had to intervene when a police patrol had gotten into an argument with an army patrol and both had drawn weapons. This was not an isolated incident. Iraqi soldiers, as previously mentioned, were mostly Shia from Baghdad and Basrah, and there was no love lost between them and anyone from Fallujah. We adjusted by hiring many Fallujans, once again vouched for by city council members, imams, or precinct elders. My battalion gunner, CWO3 Tom Beecher, then trained them to operate the ECPs under police and Marine supervision. This was yet another measure that was well received by the Fallujans. We had removed a major source of irritation at the city’s entry points and had gotten even more unemployed young men off the streets and earning some money.

It worked so well that when we proposed to the city council that some women be hired and trained to work at the ECPs searching the women who came through, there was enough trust that this perennially prickly issue did not cause a riot. They agreed to it after a lengthy discussion, and we started the process of hiring and training women to work at the ECPs. This removed yet another source of irritation; Iraqi women underwent searches by other Iraqi women, not men, and American women could return to their original assigned duties..

Aside from the ECPs, we also started making modifications with the system of observation posts around the city. Some became JSSs, while others were eliminated entirely and replaced by cameras on towers that enabled us to observe the areas from a safer vantage point. One of the first to go was OP Adams, where we had had two Marines seriously injured in an RPG attack early in the deployment. All military equipment was removed in one night, and by morning it looked like just another damaged house. We found the owners, reimbursed them for the damage and time we had occupied the house, and left them to make it into their home again. This was also done with all the houses occupied by the Iraqi army units. Once again, we had removed an irritant. The Iraqis did not always agree with the amount of money they received for reimbursement, but they were happy to get back into their homes.

Just after the middle of July, I was asked to attend a conference in Baghdad for commanders who were about to bring their units into Iraq. It was part of a concerted effort to instruct them on counterinsurgency methodology and get them to understand why it was important for them to implement these measures. There was still a great deal of skepticism regarding counterinsurgency techniques because they involved patience and a more measured approach to the use of force. Many in our military did not believe we should be conducting these types of missions because they caused conventional war-fighting skills to atrophy. My belief has always been that we will be ordered to do whatever the nation needs done, regardless of the type of warfare involved, and thus we need to be prepared to conduct the

“lighter” forms of warfare. We cannot “opt out” when faced with tasks that do not involve conventional war-fighting skills. There are many who still do not seem to understand that to this day. I did my best to describe the measures we had taken in Fallujah and used statistics to prove that they were working when nothing else had previously. I made a specific point that being heavy-handed tended to make matters worse. I could see from the faces of those in the audience that some agreed wholeheartedly and others did not. I never ceased to wonder about how much damage was done to the overall mission by those who just did not, or would not, understand the realities of the situation in Iraq.

Meanwhile, back in Fallujah, I was sitting in my room on our base one August Sunday afternoon when a I heard a huge explosion, close enough to swing my door open and for dust to come sprinkling down from my ceiling. We immediately set about trying to find out what had happened. We saw a dense cloud of smoke rising from an Iraqi highway patrol building about a mile away. It turned out that a large dump truck rigged as a suicide bomb had attacked the highway patrol building along the main highway that skirted Fallujah. The highway police (similar in concept to state troopers at home) in the building had fired on the truck, but the windshield had been bulletproof and the driver had survived long enough to smash into the building and set off the bomb, killing or injuring several police officers. This was a major source of concern to me as we had some observation posts situated too close to the highway to thwart such an attack. The first thing that we did was get armor-piercing ammunition for the most exposed posts; then we erected more cameras, which enabled us to eliminate the more exposed positions and draw back to more defensible positions. This took a while to accomplish, but it was a relief once complete.

We worked hard for the success achieved over that summer, but we also had some great luck. When someone suggested to us that we ought to hire local artists to paint murals on some of the larger traffic barriers, we were skeptical at first. It seemed like a waste of money, but we decided to give it a try. It turned out to be another instance of an irritant being minimized

(ugly traffic barriers everywhere) and more money going to unemployed men. What was even more amazing was the work they did. Some of the murals were beautiful. There was one beach scene that I particularly liked. I would have liked to have taken it home with me, but I did not think I would have been able to get a thousand-pound traffic barrier on the plane with me when I departed. Others were Iraqi flags, public service announcements, and, in an interesting twist, neighborhood watch signs that really served to spook Iraqis with nefarious intentions. We used the neighborhood watch signs from home as a model, and the Iraqis thought the eye in the sign was the evil eye watching them. Some Iraqis informed us that this intimidated the insurgents. I am not sure I ever bought that one, but the symbol seemed to have an unexpected positive effect. Another positive by-product of this public art was that insurgents had almost nowhere to put their graffiti. This had been one of the enemy's most potent actions for threatening the population and ridiculing Coalition and Iraqi security forces, and now they had lost this ability to a bunch of starving artists. This method had been used to good effect by the French officer David Galula in Algeria as recounted in his book *The Pacification of Algeria*, and we saw it work here in Fallujah also. It served to give people a sense of pride in their city as well as a reason to stop allowing the insurgents to trample all over them. They could now move off the fence and come over to the government's side.

In yet another stroke of good luck, the Iraqi national soccer team did very well in the Asia Cup tournament that summer. They reached the championship round, and the championship game was played on a scorching afternoon in August. We had the game broadcast from the loudspeakers on all the JSSs we had established by that time. Many people were watching or listening to the game, and I passed word that if the Iraqis won, all Marines needed to be inside or under cover before the end of the game since the Iraqis usually celebrated by firing weapons into the air. Well, they won and the people poured into the streets and fired off anything they could get their hands on. I do not know if any Iraqis were killed or injured from bullets returning to earth, but no Marines were. We also garnered more goodwill by broadcasting the game and not interfering with their victory celebrations. In some ways, it was as if their sense of self confidence was returning with each positive development in the city.

Yet another goodwill measure that paid enormous dividends was freeing young men from the prison system and returning them to their homes. As one example, a member of the city council approached me after a meeting and asked if I could help him. He had always been a good man who wanted to do the right thing for Fallujah, so I asked what concerns he had. The unit previous to us had picked up his next-door neighbor's son, and he had not been seen since. The Iraqi indicated that he was a good young man who had never been in any trouble and had likely been in the wrong place at the wrong time. I took down the young man's information and told the city councilman that I would see what I could do. It took us some time to track down the whereabouts of the young man and get the particulars of his case. He had indeed been rounded up, and there was not much evidence against him, but the court system was so backed up it would be months before they got to his case. I was able to vouch for the young man on behalf of the city councilman, and I had the councilman sign a statement that he would ensure that the young man would stay out of trouble. It took more than a month, but when we finally got the young man released, it was quite an event. My security detail and I picked him up from the holding facility, and I talked to him, stressing that he needed to stay out of trouble and find a job. He was so relieved to be out of prison that he was almost crying when he replied that if he could just see his mother, he would never get in trouble again. We drove into the city and went to his neighborhood. When we got to his house, he burst out crying and knelt down to kiss the ground in front of his home. There was a small crowd watching and they were also quite emotional. The real waterworks began when he went inside his house. We did not enter with him, but we could hear his mother crying hysterically and saying his name over and over again. The city councilman had tears in his eyes as he profusely thanked us and hosted a meal for us. It seemed like such a small gesture, but the impact was enormous as word spread. We saw the young man about a week later when he came in to get an identity card. He was cleaned up and all smiles.

I could never be sure if it was our willingness to get people released or a spontaneous act of goodwill on the part of Chief Faisal, but late in the summer he decided to host a large prisoner release ceremony. He had accumulated many prisoners in his holding facility in the middle of the city. I had occasionally looked in on it and was always reminded of the scenes

from the movie *Midnight Express*, about a young American man who tried to smuggle drugs out of Turkey and spent a number of years in a Turkish prison. Conditions in the Fallujah jailhouse were not good, but I did not see any evidence of maltreatment. I also used every opportunity to talk to Faisal about getting a judge to Fallujah so they could process prisoners, but he decided to go a different route. He passed word that he would hold a release ceremony. We were invited to attend, and it made for quite a scene. All the city dignitaries were there, as well as anyone who had loved ones in the holding facility. The ceremony was held right at the entrance to the Government Center. Early in the deployment, a gathering of that sort would have been impossible because of the threat of mortar attack or a suicide vehicle. We had a great deal of security posted, but this event went off without any sort of attack. Speeches were made as those to be released sat on the ground and waited patiently. The gist of the speeches was that a new day had dawned in Fallujah. The elders of the city needed to keep their young men out of trouble. When the time for the actual release of the prisoners arrived, there was a burst of emotion as loved ones reunited. In my experience, I have found Arabs to be an emotional people, and this trait was much on display that afternoon. It was good to see. Not everyone was released, but it was a sufficiently large number that it generated more goodwill toward both the police and Coalition Forces. Everyone assumed that it only happened because we made it happen. Little did they know that we were merely spectators during the process of planning and release.

The remainder of the summer stayed fairly quiet and free of violence. We did have a notable victory that seemed to solve the sniper problem, at least in the city. In late August, Captain Cheng and his men received word that a group of insurgents was in a building just south of the main road through Fallujah in the Senaa neighborhood. Apparently, some of them were trained snipers. The tip came from the police, and Cheng and his Marines accompanied them on another early morning raid. It was apparent that the insurgents were planning some sort of trap because several had suicide vests on, but for whatever reason, probably because we got to them earlier than they believed we would, they put up a feeble fight and then tried to flee. None made it. The Marines shot and killed all of them as they ran and tried to return fire. One insurgent’s suicide vest caught fire and no one wanted to go close to him for fear he would explode. When the fire

burned out, there was not much left. After that incident, there were no more sniper attacks inside the city limits. Unfortunately, they still continued outside of the city. The logistics battalion supporting us lost a Marine who was trying to resupply water to an operating base immediately outside of the city. The Marine climbed on top of his tanker truck to start the resupply and was shot off the truck. The city of Karmah, northeast of Fallujah, still had snipers too, so we sent sniper teams to help Lieutenant Colonel Letoile's battalion. Our sniper teams participated in a large operation trying to locate and kill the enemy snipers, but it was to no avail. It almost seemed as if everywhere we sent members of our battalion, peace broke out. The last incident we had in the city that lightly wounded one of our Marines was when an insurgent fired an RPG at one of the bunkers on top of the JSS for Senaa. It collapsed the bunker and gave the Marine inside some light shrapnel wounds, but we had the bunker completely repaired and operating in short order, while the Marine quickly recovered. It was yet another case of a seemingly wasted attack.

The effect of the operations we were conducting had other consequences as well. At the height of the fighting in May, higher headquarters decided we would be a good test bed for a new type of vehicle that had a remotely controlled machine gun mounted on its top. It also had an acoustic radar that could pick up the sound of a single round being fired at us and determine from where it came. Once that happened, the gunner inside could use a computer screen to aim the machine gun at the indicated location and return fire, all in a short amount of time. It was an experimental system, and when we were briefed on it we were all pretty excited. It took more than a month and a half to arrive, and by the time it did, Alljah had quieted the city down to the point that we could not combat test the vehicle. We patrolled with it for more than two weeks, and no one ever took a shot. The people who brought it to us quickly got bored and found a reason to leave. I do not know if they ever went elsewhere, but I never heard of it being used again and have never seen it since. I hesitate to call this a negative consequence of Operation Alljah, but in some ways I am glad we never had the chance to test it for real.

It was amazing to watch the transformation of Fallujah. In addition to the private Iraqi entrepreneurs who started their own beautification or civic projects, a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise started up in the city. My Marines and I joked that it was a sure sign we were indeed winning. Congressional delegations visited, and we took them on foot patrols through the city. They were swarmed by kids and thoroughly impressed with the progress. On one foot patrol in the Al-Andalus neighborhood, my Marines and I watched as a group of young Iraqi boys ran and dove off the side of an embankment into the Euphrates River. They called to us to join them, which was tempting due to the heat. It certainly would have been nice to cool off, but the Euphrates was polluted with all sorts of foul things, and I could only imagine what we would catch by swimming in it. As we moved on, we came across a nursery that had opened on the banks of the river, with many different sorts of flowering plants and trees for sale. I love to garden and do yard work around my house, so I enjoyed looking through the nursery. Perhaps most poignant, it was in the same area that the battalion in Fallujah previous to us had lost an entire Humvee, with all its occupants either killed or badly wounded, to a large improvised explosive device. The contrast between their deaths and the beginnings of life in the city was profound.

Of all the visitors who came through Fallujah that summer to get their “I was in Fallujah” T-shirt (as we liked to joke), probably the most important delegation came in on the first of September. Just prior to returning to the United States to testify before Congress on the situation in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus and reporter Katie Couric visited Fallujah. We took them to a precinct council meeting in the Khadairy precinct (the first one we had established as part of the swarm), and then on a foot patrol through the Sook (market) in the Al-Andalus neighborhood, which had been one of the city’s worst areas when we had first arrived. Business was flourishing, and everyone was excited to see the general and the entourage of senior Iraqi officials. General Petraeus talked to the residents and even tried some of the local food. He and Ms. Couric were much braver than I was in that regard; I steered clear of anything that was not thoroughly cooked for fear of being incapacitated for days with diarrhea. The trip was uneventful. I like to think that it served to exemplify the progress in many areas of Iraq. A city that had once been a perennial center of insurgent activity, virtually written off the previous year by a senior Marine intelligence officer, had turned the

corner and seemed to be on the right track. It had also happened fairly quickly. Perhaps it was this relatively sudden turn-about that caused members of Congress to claim that accepting what General Petraeus was saying in his testimony required a “willing suspension of disbelief.”

Toward the end of September, I was invited to a meal at Sheik Khamis’ house on the peninsula west of the city. Our old friend Aifan Saddun greeted me as I arrived and showed me in to the main part of the house, where he had hosted a meeting of the Albu Issa tribal members earlier in the year. I had never been there before and was impressed with its size, style, and comfortable features. Colonel Simcock was there, as were many members of the city council and some from the “sheiks council.” All were in a good mood, and the food was both great and plentiful. The Marines from my security detail were also fed, and for many of them it was the first time eating real Iraqi food. Not all were thrilled, but they all ate. They were, after all, good Marines. After the meal, Aifan Saddun came around with a spray can of what we called “Iraqi man smell.” It was a very strong cologne, and apparently they all liked to use it. They also joked around a lot about how bad we smelled from all the sweating we did on our patrols. I was sitting against a wall talking to some other Marines when he came up and doused me with the cologne. I took it as gracefully as I could, but it was a little difficult to explain as I climbed back into my armored Humvee for the trip back to our base. I took a lot of good-natured ribbing and a lot of “yeah sure, Sir” as I tried to explain why I smelled as I did. It took quite some time to wear off too, even after showering!

As we approached the end of this deployment, the most heartwarming thing for me personally was the reaction of the Marines in our battalion who were on their second tour in Fallujah. Their previous tour had been violent, and they had seen many comrades killed and wounded without ever seeing any change for the better. They talked about how they had patrolled day after day through the heat, sewage, rotting garbage, and rubble while waiting to get hit by an ambush or sniper fire. Now they walked streets that had been cleaned up and where violence was now the exception. They saw an almost complete transformation. It validated all the effort and sacrifice they had put in to make it happen. We were not going to lose Fallujah, and they had been a part of making that a reality.

|| Chapter 12 ||

Voice of the People

I believe that the pulse of government should be strong and steady, and the men at the helm imbued with missionary zeal.

Ramon Magsaysay, Philippine president (www.rmaf.org.ph/)

On June 23, I attended my last Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council meeting. The Marines and I had long gone to these meetings primarily to hear the complaints the council brought up as sort of an early warning system for problems in the city. As it became clear that the FTSC had more nefarious plans, we finally decided that a clean break with the group was needed. We attended this final meeting of the "sheiks" to gauge how Operation Alljah had been received and how Bakr's return to the city from Syria was going. The meeting was led by Bakr, and he had about thirty-five "sheiks" and *muktars* in attendance. He opened the meeting by saying that the ongoing Alljah security plan in the city of Fallujah had many positive and negative aspects to it. He stressed that last Tuesday's Fallujah city council meeting, which Bakr had attended, tried to solve the problems but had thus far not come up with any answers. He then stressed that if it hadn't been for the hard work of the city's "sheiks" and *muktars* the security plan would not have worked at all. He stressed that many men had been working behind closed doors, working with the people, and that this "invisible army" had greatly helped Alljah operations. He mentioned that

hundreds of Fallujah residents had approached the “sheiks” and *muktars* asking for assistance and saying that their needs were not being met. Bakr then said that the people were looking for a solution. This was clearly an attempt by Bakr to gain some political favor from the success of Operation Alljah.

Bakr then began thanking those sheiks who had stayed in Iraq to help their tribal members, and he excoriated those who had fled to Jordan or Syria. Bakr said that he had met with some of these sheiks in Syria and said they had forgotten about Fallujah and Iraq while they lived in relative luxury. He had requested that these sheiks return to Iraq, and because they had refused they were not worthy of respect. Bakr then said that most of the Coalition Forces and the Iraqi government dealt with these sheiks who lived abroad because they were important, but the fact was they were not important at all. He said that if the tribe was unwilling to protect a sheik in Iraq, then the sheik must not be important. Bakr was attempting to call into question the whole strategy of working with the tribes against al-Qaeda. He then stated that all of their lives were at risk, but if they had the backing of their tribe no one would threaten them and that the sheiks who lived abroad could not even find ten people from their tribe to protect them.

Bakr then stressed that to be a member of the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council, each sheik who lived abroad had to sign a membership form and get the support of his tribe. Some sheiks preferred not to be members of the FTSC or the Fallujah city council, he said, and the city council was still too weak and unable to lead Fallujah. Bakr then said he had tried to “warm up” the city council but that he had no personal interest in doing so; the city council opposed the “sheiks council” because they did not understand what they did, and some members of the Fallujah council had already left the country and had been replaced because many residents refused to join them if they were not a member of a political party. He said they needed independent sheiks and independent members who claimed no party affiliation. He then suggested that three or four members of the city council were corrupt like the former mayor of Fallujah.

Bakr then changed the emphasis of his speech by remarking that the city council had at least six seats for tribal sheik members and that Fallujah was a tribal city. He said that 50 percent of Fallujah’s tribes were represented on the city council and he then asked rhetorically about the other 50 percent.

There were six tribes, Bakr said, in Fallujah—the Albu Issa, Albu Jumayli, Mohammedi, Al Assawi, Halbusi, and Zobai—and each sheik representative to the city council had to be nominated by the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council. He said that each member should be approved by all the tribes represented on the FTSC so they would represent all the areas around Fallujah and not just their own tribal area. Then, speaking to the FTSC, he said "we have to do it" and reiterated that the city council needed sheiks who were approved by the FTSC. He criticized the current sheiks on the council by saying they were deaf to the interests of the people and were weak and feeble. If they were nominated and approved by the "sheiks council" they would not act like this on the city council. Bakr then said that the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council needed to reactivate the "sheiks council" and that it needed to be courageous and nominate people to lead Fallujah. He stated that he had heard numerous complaints from the people about the city council, and he proceeded to give the Marines a brief overview of the tribal structure in Fallujah.

It was clear that Abu Bakr was not pleased with the changes that had taken place in Fallujah since he had gone on his month-long trip to Syria for ostensibly medical reasons. His plan to reconvene the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council meetings at their regular meeting place outside the Joint Coordination Center in downtown Fallujah, and his exhorting Coalition Forces to facilitate the attendance of members of the Iraqi police and Iraqi army, municipal directors of the city, and members of the media, was an attempt to give his meeting the trappings of an official government entity. His continued complaints that the city council did not represent the people of Fallujah and that the Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council did continued to ring hollow in my ears, although it was curious why several of the city's *muktars* continued to attend meetings. Bakr's not-too-subtle threats of unspecified consequences if the Marines and Iraqi government did not alter how they handled the FTSC did not augur well for continued peace in the city. The only good sign from the meeting was that Bakr clearly saw the last two Fallujah city council meetings, where attendance was high and the key players of Fallujah attended, as a threat, because unlike his organization the city council had resources that could be thrown at a problem. It also had the legitimacy the "sheiks council" lacked and was always actively trying to acquire.

On June 26, I attended the next Fallujah city council meeting, and by this point the neighborhoods of Khadairy and Jubayl had been swarmed as part of Operation Alljah, with the swarm of the neighborhood of Dubat about to begin. It was clear that the strategy was bearing fruit. While the mayor wasn't there, attendance was significant and a long-dormant community was resurgent. Sheik Hamid opened the meeting by apologizing for the mayor's absence. He explained that the mayor was presently working to address the problem of a lack of fresh water in the city, although he told us later that the mayor didn't want to attend the meeting because while the city council talked about problems, they weren't generally able to solve any, and he didn't want to be in a position to not solve the city's problems. Hamid then turned the conversation over to Lieutenant Colonel Daoud of the Iraqi police to discuss the security issues of the city. Daoud began his talk by mentioning that the police were involved in a new security operation much similar to the one that had secured Ramadi. Its goal was to stop the "bad" people from killing and kidnapping local residents. He then mentioned that the police had just opened a new police precinct in the Jubayl neighborhood that was working well and that they planned to open additional precincts in the Dubat/Nazal area. Daoud then mentioned that the Marines and Chief Faisal had recently met about opening new stations throughout the city and that two hundred slots were available for each neighborhood to form a local watch. He then mentioned that the security plan had negative and positive aspects to it, such as that the people were happy with the improvement in security but that they were now clamoring for jobs. He then mentioned that the Iraqi police would work all day long to find the "bad" people, and he said that the police had recently discovered nine suicide vests and a large weapons cache. He then commented that many young people were found with these weapons and that all too often these impressionable young men were falling under the negative influence of the *takfiri*. He sympathized with the people undergoing hardships because of the security plan, such as taxi drivers being unable to drive around town and local workers unable to get to their shops and businesses. Daoud said he was confident of the situation in general, but he asked the assembled directors and people to help

with the operation. He said the Iraqi police visited with families throughout Fallujah every day, and he asked the city council to tell the police if any of their members abused anyone. He also exhorted them to explain the security plan to the people and to check any reports the people made about negative police behavior, because sometimes the reports were wrong and they needed good information if they hoped to make the Iraqi police a good police department. Normalcy was returning to the long oppressed people of Fallujah, and the people were beginning to address their own issues. It was inspiring to witness the rebirth of a community that had long suffered under the yoke of Islamist oppression.

We had reached the point of irreversible momentum in local government. The latest city council meeting on July 11 was the most attended I had ever seen, with not just the council members, the mayor, and the police attending, but most of the heads of the municipal departments and many members of the media, including representatives of Reuters and the *New York Times*. But the most momentous development was that both Sheik Khamis of the Albu Issa tribe and Sheik Meshan of the Jumayli attended, bringing their extensive security details with them. The tribes were now in the city, and they were unified with the people of Fallujah. I was sitting at the edge of the room when Sheik Khamis arrived with Meshan close after him. His dark sunglasses set against his baby blue head covering were stark with his thin frame. Several young men with chest rigs for AK-47 magazines entered with him, eyeing us confidently as they clenched their assault rifles. They quickly fanned out into the room as a number of other subsheiks entered in their wake. Here was tribal officialdom in all its power. Khamis and Meshan settled down at the long wooden table at the middle of the room, and members of their security detail procured water for them. It was quite a display of power meant as much to impress as to intimidate. It was going to be interesting to see how the more staid city council members and the mayor in particular were going to handle this clear expression of tribal authority.

The meeting began with an extended discussion between the Iraqi police and members of the tribes in and around Fallujah. The central points of contention revolved around who had the authority to detain suspects and the respective areas of responsibility for the tribes and the Iraqi police. The tribal representatives were arguing for a more expansive understanding of their authority with respect to handling detainees in their tribal areas and were attempting to limit the authority of the Iraqi police. To his credit, the police representative saw this for what it was and vigorously pushed back at the tribal leaders, telling them that he did not need them to tell him or the police where their authority ended and how to do their jobs. He said the authority of the police was throughout the area in and around Fallujah. Thankfully, this fractious issue did not upend the meeting, but it seemed that it would likely be brought up again. The meeting then turned to a general discussion of the distribution of gas, diesel, and propane, the lifeblood of Fallujah, throughout the city and in the tribal areas as well as a revision of some of the entry control points into the city. It was a shorter meeting than usual but symbolic of the direction of things to come. The people were uniting, and politics was replacing combat as the subject of human conflict.

The Marines and I held a second meeting with the mayor in his office. He was upbeat, and while he welcomed the participation of the area's tribes in the city council, he cautioned that they needed to work in good faith with members of the council and not try to dominate it. He said that today's meeting was positive, if a little disorganized, with the tribes playing a constructive role. The mayor then mentioned he had received a tip about an arms cache in the city and had recently sent his men out to procure it. At this point, his men brought in two 155-mm artillery rounds and about eight RPG rounds wrapped in two large colorful blankets. He said that some residents were concerned about getting in touch with the police out of fear that someone might be working with al-Qaeda, and so he had created an e-mail address local residents could use to get in touch with him about insurgent behavior or the location of arms caches. You couldn't ask for a more civic-minded official. The mayor then said that many people in the city were thanking him for the strong improvement in security and the beginning of improvements in basic services, but that he wanted to assure us that it was a team effort and that the Marines had a lot to do with the

area's successes. It was a welcome gesture and symbolic of how far our relationship with the Sunni Arab population had come over the years.

The positive effects of Operation Alljah were being felt throughout the city, and attendance at the city council meetings surged. The few brave souls who had attended the initial meetings of the council in the late spring were now overwhelmed as attendance surged to between forty-five to sixty interested residents each week. Chairman Sheik Hamid continued to preside over the meetings despite the threats to his life, and the mayor and Chief Faisal continued to provide needed stability to local government. Both the Jumayli and the Albu Issa tribes started to send representatives, and the middle class of the city, the teachers, doctors, architects, and engineers, also started to attend. The city council meetings were increasingly well-run, and its members were aggressively questioning the various directors of the city's municipal departments about their projects around the city. There was no greater pleasure for me than seeing the city's directors squirm under the inquiries of Fallujah's city council members. Accountability, responsibility, legitimacy, capacity, and efficacy were finally concentrated in one place that was the true expression of the voice of the people. The local media were also attending the meetings, and most of the major civic officials provided interviews, speaking directly to the people about the challenges of the city. The Fallujah Tribal Sheiks Council and its leader Abu Bakr were now just a shadow of their former selves. Bakr returned to a city that was different from the one he had departed when he had gone on a month-long vacation to Syria. The shattered metropolis occupied by a shattered people had been replaced with a confident population looking to the future. Bakr's murderous ways were receding to the past and taking with them the damaged history of the city.

With the completion of Operation Alljah in September, the four-month-long population security plan implemented by 2nd Battalion 6th Marines fundamentally changed the city. In March of 2007 there had been approximately 750 security incidents in both the city and surrounding countryside of Fallujah, and as the months went by and a population-centric

campaign plan was implemented, security dramatically improved. There were about 650 security incidents in the month of April, 520 in May, 420 in June, 260 in July, 220 in August, 180 in September, and about 80 in October. This number stood in stark contrast to the approximately 690 security incidents that had taken place in October 2006. Buildings that had lain dormant since 2004 were filling up with people as refugees returned and broken minarets and shattered homes were rebuilt. With ten police precincts watching over Fallujah's disparate neighborhoods, with thousands of additional neighborhood watch members and hundreds more police officers, the population finally had the enduring security it needed to turn against the insurgency. The insurgents had nothing left to offer except fear and death. As this awakening of Fallujah's people took place, the tribes surrounding them also rose to the challenge of rejecting al-Qaeda. With the return of Sheik Meshan of the Jumayli tribe and Sheik Khamis further consolidating his authority within his own tribe, the Anbar Awakening movement was knocking on the doors of Baghdad after beginning as a tribal revolt in the town of Al Qaim on the Syrian border to the west. The confluence of Mayor Saad, Police Chief Faisal, and Chairman Sheik Hamid was an amazing combination, and no greater triumvirate of leaders could be found to fundamentally change Fallujah as much as they did. They had the support of the people, were competent and dedicated, and formed a team that supported each other during the challenges of 2007. We finally had the local leadership we needed to successfully fight the insurgency, but it had come at great cost as the Sunni Arab community had long allied with al-Qaeda to fight the new reality of postinvasion Iraq. With time, different policies, and a changing political environment, however, they saw the need for a departure from the past and toward a new future.

I last met with the mayor on October 12, 2007, at his office at the Government Center. Although getting funding for Fallujah's government from Anbar's provincial government as well as from Baghdad more broadly was still a challenge, the mayor generally had the resources he needed to do his job. He was working closely with the embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, which had helped him craft a formal budget for his office and was assisting him with hiring additional staff to handle his office's increasingly heavy workload. The once shattered building he had moved into in March 2007 had been refurbished, and the concrete walls the

Marines had erected around it had been painted by local artists with scenes of palm trees and lakes. The broken windows had been replaced, and the city council's chambers had been redone to their former glory. Power was much more regular now and air conditioning filled the building. The infamous sewage pond that had regularly filled the mayor's backyard was becoming a thing of the past as the city's sewage lines were fixed and its drainage pipes cleared. The mayor's example of leadership was a great thing to witness and so different from my previous experiences in Afghanistan. I was so grateful I could help him with small infusions of money, humanitarian assistance, office supplies, an up-armored vehicle, and, quite frankly, simply time and attention. It taught me a lot about how one motivated person could make a difference in the lives of a people and a nation.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries, and I told the mayor I was departing Iraq for home and that it had been an honor to work with him. I expressed my great respect for his dedication to Fallujah and Iraq and that with all the improvements going on he was well-placed to have a positive impact on the people. He came around his desk and thanked me for all my support and help and wished me well. We posed for pictures, and after we finished shaking hands he joked through our interpreter that our handshake was like Anbar Awakening leader Sheik Sattar's with President Bush earlier in the year. We both laughed uproariously. Little did he know about my own political background, but I wondered if this meant he also felt his own days were numbered once the United States had departed; Iraqi humor frequently had a dark underside to it. (Anbar Awakening founder Sheik Sattar had been assassinated not long after his photo had been taken with President Bush.) I was hopeful, however, that as much as the insurgency might get lucky and kill an Iraqi policeman or an innocent civilian, it no longer had the sway it did in Al-Anbar Province, and the people were now in charge once again.

|| Epilogue ||

The Arabic-speaking countries are easy to conquer. They are not as yet consolidated and organized, as are the Western Powers. The troubles of the would-be invader only begin when the conquest is over. Insufficiently organized to oppose a regular army in battle, these people are experts at sedition, conspiracy and rebellion.

John Bagot Glubb, *Britain and the Arabs*, 1959

In looking back at the events of the summer of 2007, as well as back to 2003, it is hard to come to a judgment regarding the worth of all that was lost. The cultural misunderstandings that led to the initial violence in 2003 could likely have been avoided. The reaction to the killings of the four contractors and the hanging of their bodies on the "Blackwater Bridge" on the western edge of the city could also have been better. Marine commanders on the spot realized that going in heavy would be a mistake, but they found themselves overruled. This truly was the start of the four-year-long nightmare of destruction and violence for Fallujah as well as for all of the U.S. military and Iraqi security force personnel who served in or around that city. The level of overall violence (with the exception of the months of April, November, and December of 2004), while not extraordinary given what was going on in Ramadi and Baghdad as well as other places in Iraq, gave Fallujah a symbolic value that most other places did not have. It had been on the news a great deal more because of the events in 2004 and was therefore better known among the American public. Losing control of the city to the insurgents after the great sacrifices in the

battles of 2004 would have been a psychological shock that we likely would not have been able to overcome. Many were predicting the city's total loss, while those clamoring for us to pull out of Iraq were becoming more strident. Turning this situation around in the space of four months so that Fallujah could become a positive symbol of what could be, given the right approach, was part of the Iraq-wide turning point that occurred in the summer of 2007 under General Petraeus. His visit to Fallujah with journalist Katie Couric in early September 2007, just prior to returning to testify before the U.S. Congress, was proof enough that what had happened in Fallujah was significant.

Given all of this, it is not the intention of the authors to claim that we did everything right and therefore deserve all the credit for turning Fallujah around during that long and tremendously hot summer. What happened that summer was the result of four years of dedication and professional behavior on the part of everyone who served in or around that city. The Americans who served there would likely readily share this fact with anyone willing to listen. More important, though, it was the Iraqis themselves who told us that part of the reason for the "awakening" was that U.S. forces had, for the most part, always been professional and restrained in their approach. When faced with the choice of a future with the rabid Islamists of al-Qaeda or cooperating with us to drive them out of their country, they knew that we would work with them for a better future if they only gave us the chance. It took years of patient, painstaking operations, day in and day out, to prove this to the Iraqis, mainly because they had been brought up under Saddam to hate and distrust Americans. Many of the policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003–2004 had also embittered them toward us. Thirty years of indoctrination, coupled with major cultural differences between Iraqis and Americans, as well as occasional American heavy-handedness, proved difficult to overcome.

Another factor one cannot overlook was the effort of the unit immediately preceding us in Fallujah. They had taken a beating during their deployment, but their commander, Lt. Col. Harold R. "Odie" Van Opdorp, had never ceased trying to make progress with the Iraqi security forces. In particular, he and the Marines working with the Iraqi army in the city had engineered the removal of the brigade commander, who had been caught trying to sell weapons and equipment that his brigade had been issued to the

Sadr Militia, with which he was involved. It took a while for his replacement to arrive, but when he did, Brigadier General Ali had an immediate, positive impact on the brigade. Van Opdorp also engineered the replacement of the previous chief of police, who had been weak and unwilling to take personal risks. Van Opdorp pushed him to step down and was involved in the interview process that resulted in the hiring of Chief Faisal, who had the same effects on the police department that Brigadier General Ali had on the Iraqi army. Lastly, just about everyone in the city was involved in getting the previous mayor to resign. He was a shady character who reminded me of Wormtail in the Harry Potter movies. We were never sure how exactly Mayor Saad got elected, or selected, but once again he was exactly the right man for the job. Young, energetic, and oriented on securing the city he was responsible for, he was a brave man. These three things came together with the awakening occurring in the rest of Al-Anbar Province right up to the time my unit arrived in Fallujah in March 2007. When one combines these things with the holistic approach that Operation Alljah brought to the city, one gets the results illustrated in these chapters.

The leadership of my battalion and I spent much time and effort throughout our preparations and during the deployment talking to our Marines in an effort to help them understand what we needed to do and why it was so important. I believe these efforts also played a role in enabling us to achieve the success we did. Perhaps my favorite talk, though, came at the end of the deployment. Together with my battalion sergeant major, Mike Lane, who had been with me every step both before and during the deployment, I stood in front of each company as they were pulled off the line in Fallujah and prepared to go home. We talked to them about all that had happened in the city and gave them an idea of just how much progress they had made. We then walked through the ranks and shook the hand of each and every Marine and sailor, gave them a battalion coin, and thanked them for everything they had done in the city over the course of the deployment. After all, they were the true heroes of the story. They performed magnificently through the heat, dust, boredom, and sometimes terrifying combat that came in an instant. They stayed vigilant and had showed the right balance between aggressiveness during combat and compassion for the citizens of Fallujah, who they realized were caught in

the middle. Some of their buddies did not come home in one piece, and others did not come home at all, but they never wavered. They did their best, and when they look back on what we did during the summer of 2007, for the rest of their lives they will know that they did indeed make a difference. They were part of something meaningful during their time in uniform. Not everyone who serves gets that privilege.

Several years have passed now since the events described in this book, and the battalion that took part in Operation Alljah no longer exists. When we returned from our deployment, after a solemn memorial service for those we lost, we scattered to the winds. Some went on to Afghanistan and unfortunately died there. Others have since retired or gotten out after serving their country honorably. The effort to pull together the story of Operation Alljah was a labor of love, especially in that I was able to get back in contact with many of the main characters from that summer. All who were contacted were excited about the prospects of a book coming out that told the rest of the story of Fallujah. If there is anyone who was not mentioned in this book who thinks he or she should have been, please accept my sincerest apologies. There were so many people involved that the attempt to include everyone would have been futile. This does not mean that their contribution was not important. Everyone who served there contributed in some way to what was achieved; I mean *everyone* who served in Fallujah from 2003 onward.

I say this because of something that happened during the deployment. I was contacted by a reporter from the Boston area during September 2007. He was making a query on behalf of a Marine who had been badly wounded in Fallujah during September 2006. The Marine had been in a Humvee conducting a patrol down the main street of Fallujah (Highway 10), and his vehicle had hit an improvised explosive device, blowing off one of his legs and causing other serious injuries. He had spent months trying to recover and learn how to use a prosthetic leg and was also likely suffering from post-traumatic stress. He was wondering if his service and sacrifice in Fallujah had meant anything. Was the city still a cesspool of

violence and destruction? In my response to the reporter, I laid out everything that had been accomplished over the summer and how different the city was from the one we had entered the previous March. I also stressed that the Marine was part of that progress because he had helped to hold the line during the bad times until we could get things lined up to turn the city around. It was my pleasure to provide that response. I hope it eased his burden somewhat and he is at peace with himself. I wish the same for everyone else who served in or around that city and still carries it with him or her to this day. There are historians who claim that the fighting in 2004 in particular was some of the more grim and desperate urban combat since the Vietnam War. I cannot say for sure, but I do know that it was a tough fight and it set the stage for the eventual success we achieved. For those who were a part of that fight: Your service and sacrifice did mean something. You will always have that to be proud of for the rest of your life.

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|| About the Authors ||

Daniel R. Green is a defense fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He served in Fallujah, Iraq, with the U.S. Navy from April to October 2007 as a tribal and leadership engagement officer and is a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves. He served in Afghanistan with the U.S. Department of State (2005–2006) and the U.S. Navy (2009–2010, 2012). His first book, *The Valley's Edge: A Year with the Pashtuns in the Heartland of the Taliban*, a memoir of his service in Central Asia, was published by Potomac Books in 2011. He received his PhD in political science from George Washington University in 2012 and lives in Washington, D.C., and Florida.

Brig. Gen. William F. Mullen III (USMC) is a twenty-seven-year veteran infantry officer in the Marine Corps and has served on the Joint Staff and as a Marine aide to President William J. Clinton and President George W. Bush. His firsthand experience with Fallujah, Iraq, began with his service there as the operations officer for the Regimental Combat Team 8 from February 2005 to February 2006, and he returned to Fallujah in 2007 as an infantry battalion commander in charge of the city from March to October 2007. He has a master's degree in political science from Marquette University and a master's degree in national security studies from the Naval War College. He and his wife live in Quantico, Virginia.

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